

LOSS, RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT OF JUNIOR MARKET LIVESTOCK SALE BUYERS IN THE STATE OF COLORADO: FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO RETENTION AND LOSS

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Abstract

Individuals with buying experience from Junior Market Livestock Sale (JMLS) Programs were identified. An analysis of the preliminary data collected from the counties yielded the identification of three distinct groups of buyers; lost, retained and recruited. Interviews of 1,440 of those individuals were conducted in late 1999 throughout the state of Colorado to determine factors effecting the retention and recruitment of buyers. Distinct categories of reasons to continue or discontinue support of the JMLS program were identified. Major retention factors include belief in the positive impact that the program has on the youth and the rewarding of members for a year of hard work in their projects. Main factors in the loss of buyer support include their feeling of a lack of appreciation and that too many other people were involved in our JMLS program, taking away some of the responsibility that should rest with the youth. Factors to consider when troubleshooting these problems are encouraging supporters to retain faith in our programs by presenting them with examples of the positive impacts that our programs have and encouraging positive behaviors in our youth, volunteers and agents/advisors through appreciation programs and innovative ways of saying thank you to our supporters.

Introduction

The county fair junior market livestock sale is the hallmark of any 4-H Youth development or FFA members' year of hard work, dedication and sacrifice. Every youth who enters that ring, does so with the knowledge that they are a winner, because they have achieved the right to sell their animal, a goal not all members achieve. Through the publicity, both negative and positive garnered by the animal agriculture industry in recent years, the junior market sale is one of the standing traditions in the agriculture organizations for youth, 4-H and FFA. It stands as the pinnacle of achievement and success for those young people enrolled in market animal projects. Reaching the sale is a sign to everyone that the animal that these young people have worked hard to raise is of superior quality.

The junior market livestock sale is one of the few chances that Extension and FFA advisors have to showcase what they do within the 4-H and FFA livestock programs all year long to an audience of people who may have no conception of what those programs entail. The success of this day rests on those individuals and businesses that come to support the sale, and the youth, by purchasing an animal. Without junior market livestock sale buyers, the sale as we know it, could not exist. Dreams and hard work, that is what showing livestock means for nearly all involved youth. Once they are inside that arena, they are winners whether or not they bring home trophies and ribbons (Johnson, 1995). That is the picture that every agent and leader in every extension county or FFA chapter will paint as they discuss their junior livestock programs and sales. The stories that you will be told will paint young people out in the show ring,

showing their animals that they have worked hard to raise, and then selling those animals at the JMLS auction at the end of the fair. The money that they make will be going back into breeding programs for their herds, or into college funds to aid in attaining a member's future educational goals. Members will be learning life skills, responsibility, communication, determination and perseverance. These skills will only make the future that they are preparing for, a smoother transition. The youth involved in livestock programs will be well rounded, well prepared for the future, and ready to attack on coming challenges. For anyone who is familiar with the junior market system, this is a well-known picture.

The overriding goal of the 4-H program is youth development and accomplishment (University of Idaho, 1999). There are many opportunities within the 4-H and FFA organizations to fulfill these two goals through leadership, citizenship and projects. These high ideals are emphasized through these two youth organizations' livestock programs, where a youth member is charged with the health and well being of an animal or animals. The livestock programs are also given the responsibility to aid in the building of positive life skills for the youth enrolled in the projects and activities. The definition of life skill development includes the development of life skills necessary to perform leadership functions in real life (Seevers & Dormody, 1995). This is a testimony to the commitment of the programs, and their leaders and advisors, to preparing their members for life after 4-H and FFA.

A Junior Market Livestock Sale (JMLS) Program is any market animal program or project that is a part of the 4-H or The National FFA Organization (FFA) youth programs. These programs involve members of the youth organizations raising

any one of several recognized animal species for a set period of time with the purpose of selling that animal at the end of the project year at the JMLS auction. Also included in these programs are the breeding animal projects, livestock judging, stockman's bowl competition, livestock and dairy presentations, animal clinics, cookery competitions, cumulative records and other activities. These programs also attempt to teach their members positive life skills, including self-esteem, character, integrity and confidence while overcoming adversity and challenges within the various projects.

The question is often asked, "Do these programs fulfill their set goals?" Participation in many different leadership activities, at a variety of levels, promotes personal development of several different kinds (Seevers & Dormody, 1995). One former member noted that projects taught him the value of hard work and commitment (Ferguson, 1995). In the last several years, however, there have been abundant amounts of publicity on questionable ethical practices within the youth livestock arenas. Several youth programs around the country have had negative news articles printed in nationally recognized publications surrounding questionable acts by members and leaders in their programs. This negative publicity is generally surrounding the JMLS auction at the end of the show and the practices that take place beforehand when members are preparing their livestock projects to show.

Fairs encourage exorbitantly high prices for champion animals. Such high prices garner more publicity. The conception is that buyers are driven by advertising, prestige, tax advantages or just fun (Fulk, 1997). Ethical violations that in some cases are only matters of questionable behaviors, running a hog in order to drop weight for example, are only the precursors to what has been called down right cheating. From drugging animals with steroids like

clenbuterol, to swapping animals the night before a sale in order to continue to show and make money from a champion animal, members in the junior livestock projects have come under fire. Some would say that the attitude has changed from youth wanting to learn about their projects to the attitude of “anything to be the Grand Champion”, in order to sell their animal first and make the big dollars at the sale. And big dollars it is, with some steers getting as much as three times their market value at the bigger livestock sales and shows nearing prices of \$90,000 or better at some points (Johnson, 1995). Some would wonder if the money is really worth the time and trouble that it takes to cheat, or if the education is still the major thrust of these programs. Throughout all this publicity and all of the negative attention, where are our buyers?

In a study of 4-H agents in Louisiana, Burnett, Johnson, and Hebert (2000) found that junior livestock show participants spent, on average, over 100 hours a year working on their project. They further found that the educational value to junior livestock show participants was high. Kieth and Vaughn (1998) noted that 4-H competitive activities, such as the junior livestock show helps youth develop personal skills such as responsibility, work ethic, cooperation, sportsmanship, and dependability. Kieth and Vaughn note that competitive youth activities also result in negative outcomes such as excessive parental involvement, unethical practices, development of bad characteristics such as poor sportsmanship and too much emphasis on winning. They further noted that additional research is needed to understand how these behaviors affect participation by youth, parents, and others in competitive youth activities. This research was conducted to address the aforementioned problem.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to describe and explore factors that contributed to retention and loss of junior market livestock sale buyers in Colorado. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Describe counties by overall buyer retention, loss and recruitment for the years 1990 through 1999.
2. Describe factors contributing to the loss of buyers.
3. Describe factors contributing to the retention of buyers.
4. Describe factors contributing to the recruitment of buyers.

Methods

Population and Sample

The target population for this study consisted of past and present junior market livestock sale buyers in Colorado counties where there was a 4-H Extension program and/or Future Farmers of American program that culminated in a junior market livestock sale. Of the 63 counties in Colorado 57 met this criterion. Past and present junior market livestock sale buyers were selected for participation in the study using a two-stage random sampling procedure (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1999). The first stage of sampling was to select 12 counties randomly from the target population of 57 counties. Extension offices in each of the participating counties were contacted to obtain lists of all junior market livestock sale buyers for a ten-year period. From this list buyers were sorted into three sub groups; retained buyers, recruited buyers and lost buyers. The second stage was to randomly select 40 participants each from the three sub groups, in each of the 12 counties. Anonymity with respect to participants' county was provided to ensure open and honest responses. The

retained buyers were those who had consistently supported sales every year for the ten-year period. Recruited buyers were those who had started buying at some point during the ten-year period and continued their support for at least five years through the end of the ten-year period. Lost buyers were those who had supported the sale for at least four years and had discontinued their support at some point within the ten-year period. A total sample of 1,440 people was selected for participation in the study.

Research design and data analysis

The research design was a descriptive and exploratory method. From a review of the literature a survey instrument was developed to collect data related to the objectives of the study through telephone interviews. Dillman's (1978) procedures for telephone surveys were followed. The instrument consisted of two general forms of structured opened ended questions to allow for individualized responses and insure participants had the opportunity to give undirected responses. The general forms of the questions used were what factors encouraged participation in the junior market livestock sale as a buyer, and what factors may contribute to discontinued support of the program? Face and content validity of the instrument was established by a panel of experts of the former Department of Agricultural Education at Colorado State University. The instrument was pilot tested

with a group of people not included in the target population. A total of 1,417 people selected for participation in the study completed the telephone interview for an overall cooperation rate of 98%. The high cooperation rate can be attributed to participants' familiarity and understanding of the University and the researcher (Miller & Smith, 1983). Responses to questions were recorded on paper by the researchers. Responses were then categorized based on the nature of the response and relying upon the researchers' judgment. Responses were read and analyzed by two trained researchers. Results generated by the two researchers were compared to determine discrepancies between researchers. When discrepancies existed the two researchers, working together, reanalyzed the data and agreed on the correct code.

Findings

This section presents findings by objectives.

Objective One

The first objective of this study was to describe counties by buyer retention, loss and recruitment for the years 1990 through 1999. As shown in Table 1, 64% of the sample were characterized as lost buyers ($f=15,842$). Twenty-five percent of buyers were categorized as recruited buyers ($f=6,300$). Retained buyers ($f=2,736$) made up 11% of the total population.

Table 1. Overall buyer retention, loss and recruitment for the years 1990 through 1999

County by code	Lost		Recruited		Retained	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
10J	1,776	87.0	144	6.0	150	7.0
3C	1,038	76.3	156	11.0	174	12.7
4D	3,042	74.0	816	20.0	240	6.0
2B	954	73.5	294	22.5	54	4.0
5E	1,002	71.2	294	20.8	114	8.0
9I	678	66.6	234	22.9	108	10.5
11K	1,422	65.8	582	26.8	162	7.4
12L	2,550	65.5	1,170	29.5	234	5.0
7G	726	65.0	282	25.0	114	10.0
6F	1,470	64.4	582	25.4	234	10.2
1A	954	42.2	648	28.8	648	28.8
8H	240	16.5	1,098	49.5	504	34.0
Total	15,852	64.0	6,300	25.0	2,736	11.0

Objective Two

The second objective of this study was to describe and explore factors contributing to the loss of buyers for the years 1990-1999. As shown in Table 2, the two most frequent responses to why there has been a discontinuation of support by buyers who have been lost is “got tired of

not receiving a thank you” (26%) and “personal business not doing well enough to participate as a buyer in the sale” (24%). Also, the two least frequent responses to why there has been a discontinuation of support by buyers who have been lost is “leaders not doing their jobs” (10%) and “programs were not well done” (10%).

Table 2. Lost Buyer Responses. Responses to the question of the catalysts to buyer discontinuation of support for junior market livestock sales

Rank	Responses	<i>f</i>	%
1	Got tired of not receiving a “thank you”	124	26.0
2	Personal businesses didn’t do well enough to participate in the sale	115	24.0
3	Children left the program	73	15.0
4	Parents were too involved	72	15.0
5	Leaders did not do their jobs	49	10.0
6	Programs were not well done	47	10.0
	Total	480	100.0

Objective Three

The third objective of this study was to describe and explore factors contributing to the retention of buyers for the years 1990-1999. As shown in Table 3, the two most frequent responses for retained buyers to the

catalyst of buyer retention questions are “4-H is a great program for youth” (27%) and “pay back for hard work” (13%). Also, the responses “have always supported the sale” (5%) and “only supporting farm/ranch youth

or ways of life” (5%) are the two least frequent responses.

Table 3. Retained Buyer Responses. Responses to the question of the catalysts to buyer retention of support for junior market livestock sales

Rank	Responses	f	%
1	4-H is great program for youth	129	27.0
2	Pay back youth for a year of hard work	60	13.0
3	Give youth money for future education	42	9.0
4	Community support	41	9.0
5	Encourages youth to work hard	40	9.0
6	Support the 4-H program [generally]	36	8.0
7	Former 4-H member	24	5.0
8	Provides youth with opportunities	23	5.0
9	Has youth in the program	22	5.0
10	Have always supported the sale	21	5.0
11	Support farm/ranch youth or way of life	19	5.0
Total		457	100.0

Objective Four

The fourth objective of this study was to describe and explore factors leading to the recruitment of buyers for the year 1990-1999. As shown in Table 4, among recruited buyers the two most frequent responses to the questions of buyer

recruitment was “youth support our businesses so we support the youth” (26%) and “[The program is] Good for the youth” (15%). Also, are the two least frequent responses by recruited buyers are “[Program is] Good for the community” (5%) and “supports only agricultural programs” (4%).

Table 4. Recruited Buyer Responses. Responses to the question of the catalysts to buyer recruitment for support of junior market livestock sales

Rank	Responses	f	%
1	Youth support buyers businesses so they support the youth	125	26.0
2	[The program is] Good for the youth	74	15.0
3	Former 4-H member	51	10.0
4	Corporate decision	45	10.0
5	Employees involved in some way in the program	28	6.0
6	Has youth in the program	25	5.0
7	Program builds positive attitude	24	5.0
8	[4-H is] Good all around program	24	5.0
9	[Buyer] has always supported the program	24	5.0
10	[Program is] Good for the community	22	5.0
11	Spouse [other family member] grew up in 4-H	20	4.0
12	Supporter of only agricultural programs	18	4.0
Total		480	100.0

Conclusions and Recommendations

Lack of appreciation shown by youth participants was the number one reason for lost buyers discontinuing participation in the livestock sale. Recruited and retained buyers did not mention appreciation shown as a reason for continued support. Culp and Schwartz (1999) found that 4-H volunteers were not motivated by individual recognition with respect to initiation, continuation, or discontinuation or support for 4-H programs. The results presented here partially support that of Culp and Schwartz (1999). Culp and Schwartz also found that affiliation was the primary reason of 4-H volunteers to begin support, while recognition and personal satisfaction were the primary catalysts to continuing 4-H volunteer support. Culp and Schwartz also found that physical impairment and feeling unneeded were the main thrusts for the discontinuation of support by 4-H volunteers. Perhaps the feeling of a lack of appreciation experienced by lost buyers is an indicator of Culp and Schwartz' volunteers' feelings of not being needed, thus supporting Culp and Schwartz (1999). More research on this association is needed to verify the hypothesized relationship.

From the total of 24,888 buyers 15,852 (64%) have been lost within a ten-year period. To continue to lose buyers at this rate could cause the junior market livestock sale system, as we know it, to be indelibly changed. A buyer not feeling appreciated is something that people in agricultural education and extension education can play a positive role in improving. Assessing whether or not our thank you programs are working is an easy enough task and something that, in light of the findings of this researcher, is essential. If our appreciation programs and efforts are working, then we continue the programs and work each year to improve them. If we find

that our programs need to be improved right away, it is a simple matter of discovering what we as agricultural educators can do to help our parents, volunteers and especially our youth make our buyers feel as important as they are. Implementing a program in extension counties that would facilitate increased appreciation efforts including innovative ideas in individual appreciation and increased volunteer/agent efforts in appreciating junior market sale buyers, could cause a significant increase in our buyer pools. This increase could in turn, lend to an increase in the success of our junior market sales. More people in our sale barns can only mean that our youth need not worry if someone will be there to bid on their projects.

The second most frequently reason cited by lost buyers for discontinuation of participation in the junior market livestock show was that their personal businesses were not solvent enough to allow them to participate. Retained buyers made no mention of business as a retention catalyst, but worth noting are that recruited buyers did mention an unwritten or informal reciprocal type agreement ("youth support us and our businesses and so we support them in their sales") as a buyer trait (26%). While in Extension, we can do nothing, directly, with regard to area business solvency; there are steps that we can take to facilitate positive partnerships between our community and our youth. Encouraging youth and parents to thank their buyers, as mentioned above, should be a priority. Parents and youth should be encouraged to contact prior buyers (those who have been out of the sale of a number of years) to extend their thanks for participations, as well as invitations to the current sale. These things all lend to a welcoming environment for those buyers who may not be able to purchase for a number of years due to business constraints, but leaves the door

open to future participation thus encouraging them to come back and support our youth. It also allows buyers a continued connection to our youth programs, and keeping a relationship between the program and its supporters. A welcoming and familiar environment is much easier to come back to than one that is cold and unfamiliar. Again, this only lends itself to more buyer participation and increased sale success.

Youth grow up and are too old to participate in the 4-H and FFA programs; that is a fact of life we cannot change. However, when it is the third most frequent response, we must attempt to address how we can rectify buyers discontinuing participation because of it. Recruited and retained buyers both mentioned that having children in the program has been a catalyst for support (6th and 9th most frequent responses respectively). However, also worth noting is that 2nd and most frequent responses respectively in those two groups and that is that the Junior Market sale program is a positive one for youth to be in. In Extension, we should take an opportunity to capitalize on this response and work towards the goal of retaining these parents who are buying animals because their children are in the program, by demonstrating what the program will do for the next generation of children in the program. If we continue to put our best feet forward, so to speak, it could encourage those parents to continue to support a great program, thereby retaining more buyers and continuing the success of the sales.

It would be no surprise to anyone that parents with children in 4-H and FFA zealously support their children's pursuits. Few parents would like to see their children fail in or out of the show and sale ring. However, when the involvement of parents gets in the way of the success that they are trying to work so hard for, the involvement must be addressed. This finding is

consistent with Kieth and Vaughn (1998) who found excessive parental involvement in competitive youth activities detracted from the overall experience. It is a difficult thing to look at a parent and tell them that they are too involved in their child's projects. When we struggle so often in a society where people are stretched to the limit, it seems to be a quandary to look at parents and tell them to be less involved with their children's livestock projects. In Extension, often times there are policies regarding parent involvement, but when it comes time to enforce them, the task is difficult. To remedy this situation we need to have strict policies regarding parent involvement at county fair shows and sales because now it does not just effect the children in the show ring and what they are learning in their projects, it is effecting the success of our sales, the reward at the end of a long year of hard work by the youth in the program. While we would not be discouraging parental involvement in their children's projects, we should be directing where that support is appropriate and where it is not. This will allow for the children to continue learning all they can with their projects and then showcase that knowledge at the fair, while still making parents an important part of the process. This also shows to our supporters that we follow through with our motto in 4-H that we "learn by doing" which will only serve to encourage supporter participation.

A program like 4-H, thrives only through the hard work of the extension agents and FFA advisors and the successful participation of parents and other adult volunteers. Without our volunteers no extension program, and especially no junior livestock sale, would be successful. The question that continually arises within extension today is what is the job of the leader? Obviously the role of the leader is very different today than it was when

extension and 4-H as we know it began years ago. Extension continues to put out volunteer management literature, and we have various different levels of volunteer leaders training, but what is that doing to our JMLS programs? How does that training and what those individuals take away from that affect what we do in the junior market livestock programs? Where do we draw the line between tried and true support and having leaders doing the job that should be the work of the youth in the programs? More importantly where do our buyers draw that line? Whether or not we want to admit it, public perception has a large amount to do with our jobs in Extension and the recruitment of new people to our programs. Obviously, we see that here is another area where the perception of the public is making a difference in our programs. When we lose buyers because they perceive that our leaders are either doing too much or not enough, we need to address that by making some sort of change to address that public perception. As with the parent involvement we, in Extension, need to have some concrete guidelines that will set forth what the role of a livestock leader is. Beyond that, we then need to have solid policies that will be enforced prior to and during the county fairs in order to ensure that the face that we put forth to the public, most importantly to our buyers, is one that shows that the youth in our programs are still the most important component and that when we say that they are “learning by doing” they truly are.

Putting on a junior livestock sale takes a tremendous amount of work by the agents and volunteers in any county. Hours of work before the sale in making programs, arranging the sale order, setting up the building, and cooking the barbeque, is just the ending of what takes months to set up. The response that the programs weren’t well done ranked sixth on the list of responses of

the lost buyers. It bears mentioning that both the retained and recruited buyers listed the opposite as catalysts for the continuation of support; “programs were great for the youth” were first and second respectively. However, again, we see that public perception is going to play a major role in the success of our programs. Extension needs to discover what it is that turns someone from a strong supporter to a lost buyer in terms of our programming. Again, we need to be able to put our best faces forward when facilitating the programs that we produce. No agent needs to be told that an organized, well facilitated program that runs with as few mishaps as possible will be better perceived by the public than one that is wrought with mistakes and hang-ups. However, having set plans on which volunteers and agents rely, will help to alleviate some of the miscommunication that causes the programs to appear to be mishandled. Keeping everyone on the same page will put out a united front instead of one that displays confusion and mistakes. Knowing that the public and our buyers are watching how we facilitate our programs, should help us to be more aware of the face that we show people during those days of fair shows and sales.

Finally, looking at the categories of both retained and recruited buyers, we see that, respectively, the first and second most frequent responses were that the “program is a great one for youth” (27% & 15%). As 4-H Extension Agents and FFA Advisors, we should continue to promote our programs and ensure that the public knows who we are and the positive impact that we are having on the youth in our communities. It is not simple public relations, it is allowing the individuals in our communities to see what the future holds, not just for those in the agriculture industry, but also for all people in the community that are invested in our youth. As advisors, we need to be getting

out in our communities with the members of our programs letting them speak to civic organizations, clubs and schools. This is the best ad campaign we could have. As enthusiastic as we are about our respective programs, nothing works better than testimonials of the youth that are reaping the benefits of what we do. If our communities see that the youth in our programs are gaining positive skills, are becoming responsible, competent young people, what better way to continue the buyers in our

community to continue their support? These youth would be living examples that the time and money that our buyers spend at our sales and at our shows, is not money misspent and time that could have been used elsewhere. To show them the positive impact our agriculture programs have on youth would be proof to our buyers that what they do as supporters of our program is indispensable, that without them the positive impacts that we make in our classrooms and in our club meetings would not be the same.

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