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## **LOCAL YOUTH AND VOLUNTEERS CELEBRATE RECORD YEAR AT PENNSYLVANIA LIVESTOCK EXPO**

**Uniontown, PA** – The Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex & Expo Center in Harrisburg was abuzz with activity last week, as more than 1,500 animals and 650 youth exhibitors turned out for a holiday-themed event complete with visits from Santa Claus and the Grinch, as well as decorating contests and other festive activities.

The Pennsylvania Youth Livestock Expo (PAYLE) pulled in record numbers this year, thanks to the hard work of President Lexie Mills and a host of volunteers from all across the commonwealth, many of them from southwestern Pennsylvania.

The expo's success drew praise from Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding, who listed some highlights on his Facebook page and paid tribute to both the organizers and the exhibitors.

"I'm always inspired by the commitment of our young people who are shaping the future of agriculture and know that the skills on display in the show ring will serve them for a lifetime," Redding said.

A Fayette County resident, Mills said she, along with a small group of friends and livestock enthusiasts, came up with the idea for PAYLE during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Pennsylvania Farm Show had to be canceled.

"When the farm show was canceled, we wanted to be able to provide an opportunity for the kids to show their animals still," she said, noting that the expo had to be moved to Ohio that year. "We brought it back to the farm show complex, and we've had it there every year since."

The expo has grown steadily since its inception; Mills said this year's show, held Dec. 13-15, came in with participation numbers that are "by far, the most we've ever had in any year."

PAYLE includes market and breeding shows for lambs, goats, cattle and pigs. The expo is open to Pennsylvania youth 21 and younger. And while the annual farm show features a wide variety of activities meant to help inform and educate the general public on all aspects of the agricultural lifestyle, the youth expo keeps its focus on those young people.

"Our biggest focus is just giving our youth a unique opportunity, providing them with a fun atmosphere and creating memories," Mills said.

Megan Ruse of Washington County is one of about a dozen volunteers on a main committee tasked with organizing and running the expo each year. She said the event requires a great deal of hard work, but it is “so worth it,” in large part because of the experiences shared and memories made there. In fact, Ruse said she met Mills – now one of her best friends – through PAYLE.

“It’s where you meet your best friends for life,” she said. “It’s where you learn how to win and lose. It’s where you learn to take care of animals.”

Ruse said many of the PAYLE directors also participate in the Pennsylvania Club Livestock Association, which is based in the western part of the state. She said the circuit draws a lot of young exhibitors who also show at PAYLE, which helps to explain why so many area youth are involved. However, she added it’s been good to see more participation from eastern Pennsylvania counties over the years.

Elizabeth Dice of Smithfield, a graduate of Albert Gallatin High School and a student at Penn State Fayette, the Eberly Campus, said she has been a PAYLE exhibitor since the very first expo.

“PAYLE isn’t the easiest show to go to, considering the holidays, but it’s always worth it,” said Dice, who shows cattle and pigs. “Good people and good livestock always make it an enjoyable time. I love the supreme champion drive and getting to see the champions showcased in a special way, as well as the giveaways they have.”

Albert Gallatin freshman Eli Wolfe said he has been going to PAYLE for four years. This year, he showed four lambs, a doe (goat) and a steer.

“I love it,” he said. “The expo center is a really great place to show, and you don’t have as many crowds as at the farm show. Everyone is there for 4-H, and it’s really exciting. There are a lot of activities and stuff for the kids.”

Wolfe said his favorite part of the youth expo is “just getting to go out there and show, and spending time with family and friends.”

Connellsville Area High School junior Tori Hearn said she has been showing market goats, beef cattle and swine for eight years but has attended PAYLE for only the past two. She’s quickly become an enthusiast.

“I love how exhibitor-friendly it is and how nice they make the show for us,” she said. “The Grand Drive is one thing that I especially love about that show. They make it this big thing, where they’ll decorate and announce every single exhibitor. They make it so special to be in that Grand Drive.”

Ruse noted this year’s PAYLE event drew so many young exhibitors, another section of the complex had to be opened to accommodate them all.

“It was a huge success, and hopefully, the kids got a lot out of it,” noted Washington County volunteer Bill Gardner.

Gardner said while he also attends the farm show and enjoys it immensely, PAYLE is very different, with a focus “on two things. The kids are number one, and the animals are second.”

Mills agrees. PAYLE was always intended to “be all about the youth.”

“The kids in this state are just phenomenal. They are second to none,” she said. “We wanted to provide not only be a stage for them to showcase their animals, but also a fun experience, a memorable experience, something that just brings everybody together.”

To learn more about the Pennsylvania Youth Livestock Expo, visit [www.payouthlivestockexpo.com](http://www.payouthlivestockexpo.com). To view photos and videos from the expo, visit [www.squareoneagrimarketing.com](http://www.squareoneagrimarketing.com).

To learn more about Fayette County, visit [www.fayettecountypa.org](http://www.fayettecountypa.org).

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For more information, contact Kristi Kassimer Harper, Public Relations Specialist, at 724-437-4571, [kkassimer@fayettecountypa.info](mailto:kkassimer@fayettecountypa.info) or Jamie Rankin, Journalist, at 724-437-4571, [jamierankin13@gmail.com](mailto:jamierankin13@gmail.com).