



# Livestock Integrity Pledge

## South Dakota 4-H

**Introduction:** The 4-H Livestock Integrity Pledge takes the refreshing approach of placing trust in 4-H parents and youth. We trust that our parents want 4-H to serve as a place for their youth to develop into contributing members of society—builders not takers. We trust that our youth want to be true 4-H'ers—desiring a good exhibition experience and willing to demonstrate personal responsibility.

This pledge is a required component of SD4-H's livestock education program. Prior to agreeing, please read, consider, and adopt the Livestock Integrity Pledge's principles in your livestock management plan and show preparations.

---

### PLEDGE AGREEMENT

As a true 4-H'er, I pledge to uphold all of the livestock integrity standards listed in this document. I also pledge to make sure that any individuals who help me with my livestock projects uphold the same standards. If I discover that I (or my helpers) can no longer uphold this pledge, I will withdraw from the 4-H exhibition.

#### Handling and Care

1. In the process of training my animal, I will take great care not to strike my animal without cause or with harmful force.
2. To promote safety to others and myself, I will ensure my animal is trained and under control before participating in any livestock exhibition.
  - a. For haltered animals, I will use an appropriate, properly fitting halter.
  - b. During the exhibition, I will guide and direct my animal without striking.
    - i. During swine exhibitions, I will use my show stick as a guide not a weapon.
3. Though exhibiting livestock is fun, the main purpose of raising livestock is to produce safe food for consumers.
  - a. As a result, I will:
    - i. Provide adequate and regular food and water, timely and veterinarian-approved medical care, and appropriate shelter and/or fencing.



- ii. Own/lease and care for my animal from at least June 1 of the current year through the end of this exhibition season or harvest, whichever comes first
    - iii. Use a timely and responsible harvest plan.
  - b. Specifically, I will not:
    - i. Use drugs in an extra- or off-label manner without a valid veterinary-client-patient relationship. (Extra- or off-label drugs cannot be used for performance enhancement.)
    - ii. 'Hold off' or force-feed my animal when not part of a treatment plan.
    - iii. Withhold water or 'drench' my animal when not part of a treatment plan.

### **Ethics and Co-opetition**

1. I will take an active role in grooming/fitting all of my exhibits in preparation for the exhibition. I will only enter the number of exhibits that allow me to take this active role in grooming/fitting each animal.
2. Regardless of my skill level or the day I am having, I will show all of my own exhibits unless I am sick/injured, or I am showing in another 4-H activity at the same time. I will only enter the number of exhibits that make it likely I can show my own exhibits.
3. Other than developing my skills and preparing my exhibits, I will not unfairly influence the outcome of the exhibition.
  - a. Specifically, I will not:
    - i. Taunt, harass, or harm another exhibitor or event personnel.
    - ii. Touch another exhibitor's animal without permission unless in an emergency.
    - iii. Contact the show judge prior to the show or during a break in the show.
    - iv. Artificially alter the weight of my animal or intentionally declare a false weight.
    - v. Inject air or other foreign materials into my animal.
    - vi. Perform any other prohibited act listed in the National Show Ring Code of Ethics.
4. If a younger or less experienced 4-H member comes to me for advice, I will help them. After all, by raising their skill level it will provide a more worthy challenge for me.
5. I will wear appropriate attire in the ring and will not use my attire or brand to influence a judge.
6. Though I may become emotional in the moment, overall I will celebrate my victories with humility and losses with grace.



### Consequences

If I discover that I (or my helpers) can no longer uphold this pledge, I will withdraw from the 4-H exhibition. Should 4-H personnel directly observe me violating this pledge, I understand they will enact appropriate disciplinary measures within the SD4-H Code of Conduct.

Youth Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Youth Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Guardian Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

---

#### *Annual pledge collection process:*

- *County-level: Annual paper-based agreement collected prior to Achievement Days/County Fair.*
- *State-level: Annual electronic acknowledgment during FairEntry enrollment for State Fair.*

**For more information about how the Livestock Integrity Pledge fits into the 4-H Livestock Project experience, please read the Situation Statement on the following page.**

*Form last updated: April 1, 2025*



**Situation Statement:** To eliminate cheating, some 4-H families have asked South Dakota 4-H to enact and enforce more stringent rules during the State Fair's 4-H Division Livestock Shows. There are three challenges associated with this request:

1. The labor force and costs associated with enhanced enforcement are not appropriate in a state that prides itself on lean, efficient government.
2. Within the context of the overall State Fair livestock experience, it can be difficult to parse when animals are being prepared for Open Class vs. 4-H vs. FFA participation.
3. As 4-H is governed by state and federal statutes, several of the known methods of livestock cheating cannot be addressed within a supported legal framework.

Rather than pursue expensive solutions to reduce only some of the symptoms, SD4-H takes this opportunity to remind our member families that, at our core, we are an 'upstream' educational provider. As this essential upstream provider in South Dakota, we value solving problems at the root level rather than merely addressing some of the symptoms downstream.

With that introduction in mind, we note that livestock cheating has three root causes:

1. Awards/incentives that make cheating worth the risk
2. Unclear expectations about what is or is not defined as ethical behavior
3. Poor influences of adult helpers

Looking at those three causes, SD4-H can address the first two at the root level. So, beginning with the 2022 4-H season, our path forward includes improvements to our shows and educational approach:

We are incorporating three solutions within our livestock shows/competitions:

- a) Adding a top award—Premier Livestock Exhibitor (PLE)\*\*--that incentivizes a more comprehensive understanding of livestock project knowledge in alignment with the Livestock Management Triangle.
- b) Reducing the importance of animal weight in the judge's initial filtering of animals during the qualifying heats. This limits issues with unethical weight alteration.
- c) Hiring market judges skilled in evaluating meat quality and less swayed by show-bred qualities.

On the education side, we are implementing several action items:

- a) Transparently inform exhibitors of the present situation. [This page accomplishes that item.]
- b) Annually require each exhibitor to sign the 4-H Livestock Integrity Pledge, which complements our 4-H Member Behavior Expectations. This pledge confirms that every exhibitor knows the ethical animal care and exhibition standards we expect.



- c) Clearly define our livestock project priorities in alignment with the Livestock Management Triangle. In order, our priorities are Showmanship then Skillathon then Market/Breeding Shows. These priorities are reflected within the scoring rubric of the PLE and the prizes at our shows.

Just like other 4-H project areas, livestock projects are a vessel for developing great young people. It is important that the vessel not be confused with the goal! Going forward, it is our expectation that 100% of our 4-H livestock exhibitors (and helpers) will exhibit the ethical behavior worthy of the 4-H mission of positive youth development. Thank you for your partnership as we work together to make the best better!

\*\*Learn more about this award and the Livestock Management Triangle via the SD4-H Information Sheet entitled *Premier Livestock Exhibitor Award*