

## Youth

By Dr. Laura Griffeth, County Extension Coordinator, Webster County

I have been thinking all last week about this article I wanted to write. I wasn't sure how to approach the issue I want to talk about. And then I participated in Cloverleaf District Project Achievement last Saturday with Webster County 4-H. It hit me that I am surrounded by some of the most amazing and fantastic young people, some I'm related to and some I just have the pleasure of working with. Let me explain.

Many who know me know how passionate I am about youth livestock projects. I think youth livestock projects, whether you show hogs, cattle, goats, lambs, or even horses, are one of the most valuable and rewarding experiences out there for youth today. How many other activities teach the level of responsibility required by someone showing an animal at a livestock show? In my family growing up, the animals got fed before the humans got fed – every day. It wasn't a chore. It was a lifestyle and choice I made with my family to be responsible for animals that I showed. Later some of the animals were bred and raised more animals that we showed, while others were harvested and provided our family with a great source of protein and food. I learned so much, so I am very glad that my nephews followed in our family's footsteps and show Red Angus cattle and market goats in Texas. I know I've whipped out my phone to show lots of you the newest pictures from their latest shows or the new animals they've gotten. And some of you even watch online when they're at their major shows like the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo two weeks ago. I try to attend as many of the major shows as I can. Aunt Laura is a great kid wrangler, laundry deliverer, food gatherer, and any other go-fer I need to be.

The 2016 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo was an event with many moving parts for the Griffeth nephews this year. Both Tyler (15) and Zachary (11) had a market goat to show and a breeding heifer to show, and Tyler was also participating in the Calf Scramble one night. Zachary showed his goat first thing Thursday morning but didn't make the cut to the top 30 out of a class of 82 head. Tyler had a heavier goat that ended up in the first class to show on Friday morning instead of Thursday afternoon like we expected. So his first activity ended up being the Calf Scramble at the rodeo that Thursday night. If you're not familiar with a Calf Scramble, it is mass chaos with calves. Thirty teenagers stand on one side of the rodeo arena floor, which is NRG Stadium where the Houston Texans play football. Only 15 200 – 300 pound calves are released into the arena. The kids chase the calves attempting to catch them, halter them, and then drag them back into the box in the middle of the arena. The ones that succeed get a \$1,750 voucher to purchase a calf that they will bring back to Houston in 2017 and show. But half will not get anything but a thanks for participating and the knowledge they tried something new. It was so much commotion that I completely lost sight of Tyler and where he was. Eventually he came out of the corner without a calf, looking completely winded. I was out of breath just watching those kids run around that arena floor. After a few minutes all the calves were caught, and the winners were announced. Unfortunately Tyler didn't catch one. He should have come to our seats shortly after the event to watch the concert that was starting. But he didn't come, and more time went by, and he still wasn't there. So we were starting to get a little concerned. Finally he appeared with his mother with his right arm in a sling. What we thought was him being winded was actually a dislocated right shoulder. That's right, Tyler was injured when another kid knocked him off a calf, completely accidental. Luckily he was examined by the sports medicine doctors that were working the rodeo. They put his shoulder back into place without pain medication other than ibuprofen and took an x-ray to confirm. Personally I would have been curled up in a ball waiting for my morphine drip. Nope this 15 year boy got his shoulder dislocated, popped back into place, came to the concert, and even ate supper, and all I could think after finding out he was ok was that he had a goat to show in 11 hours. He was up before I was the

next morning at 5 am, and we went to the barn and tried out the shoulder. He felt that he could show, so at 8:15 am he walked his goat into the show ring and showed as well as I've seen him show goats. Unfortunately he didn't make the cut either in a huge class, but how many adults would have done something similar less than 12 hours after an injury. And to top it off, he showed his heifer Saturday afternoon, less than 48 hours after dislocating his shoulder, earning a 2<sup>nd</sup> place in a very tough class. He even placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in intermediate showmanship. I am just in awe of the perseverance and tenacity of this 15 year old to see his projects to the end. We even toured the Johnson Space Center the next day, ending the week with a fabulous steak supper.

I am equally as proud of the Webster County 4-H youth who participated in Cloverleaf DPA this past Saturday. Seven 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> graders researched and wrote presentations on topics on which they were interested. Samantha Pace, Lori Wurtz, and I worked with them for the past several weeks organizing their presentations and preparing posters and other visual aids for their demonstrations. We even had a Presentation Preview Party last Friday for all the youth to present their demonstrations in front of their parents, other 4-H'ers, and even a county commissioner. They had a great time in Perry giving their presentations for the judges, interacting with 4-H'ers from other counties, and participating in some fun activities. And to top it all off, all 7 placed in the top 3 in their projects. While I enjoy placing in the top 3 as much as anybody, I was more proud of watching these youth grow in the past month and year. They've grown in maturity; they've grown in poise in front of groups; they've grown in terms of presentation skills; and they've grown as human beings. The camaraderie between the 7 4-H'ers, the 2 older 4-H'ers who went as teen leaders, and the parents, grandparents, and volunteers who went was strong. They all seemed to care as much about how someone else placed than how they placed themselves. There was a lot of cheering for Webster County 4-H Saturday in Perry.

I know this is not a traditional article that I write, and I'll get back to talking about pollinators and pruning soon. I just wanted to share a couple of experiences I've had recently with the future of this country and even this world. You know you're getting old when you say "these young kids are going to ruin everything" or "these kids don't know squat". And maybe they don't sometimes. But maybe we old folks don't either. I look at youth like my nephews or the 4-H'ers I work with and think this country is in pretty good hands.

