

More Than a Livestock Sale: Utah 4-H Communities Rally Around Youth

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Salt Lake Fairy

Story: A 4-H member stands with representatives from Les Schwab and the Bastian Family Foundation, who purchased his lamb at the Salt Lake County Junior Livestock Auction and helped raise approximately \$15,000 in support of the young exhibitor and his family.

Photo by: Dave Francis

At a 4-H livestock show, youth spend months learning to care for an animal, develop responsibility, and prepare for the moment they step into the show ring. But at livestock auctions across Utah this year, communities demonstrated that these projects can mean far more than raising and selling an animal.

In both Weber and Salt Lake counties, 4-H communities rallied around young exhibitors facing significant challenges, transforming livestock sales into powerful demonstrations of compassion, generosity, and support.



Weber Fair Story

1: Chomp with his goat Santa.

Photo by: Lacey Sappington

In Weber County, nine-year-old Brandon "Chomp" Barela was preparing for his first year in 4-H and his first livestock show. A member of the West Weber Wether's Club, he received a goat from club leader Brian Opheikens and named him Santa.

Barela has faced significant health challenges throughout his young life. Born with Down syndrome and a congenital heart defect, he experienced heart failure in March and underwent surgery to receive a pacemaker and a new heart valve. Just one week before the Weber County Fair, he experienced heart failure again and was unable to show Santa.

But his 4-H community stepped in.

Barela's best friend and fellow 4-H member, Tyttan Sappington, led Santa into the show ring on his behalf. When Santa entered the Junior Livestock Auction, the crowd rallied around Barela and his family. Bidding climbed until Santa sold for more than \$41,000.

The generosity did not stop there. The buyers returned Santa to Barela's family, allowing them to take him home and care for him. His younger sister has also been able to spend time with Santa, and the family hopes Barela will be able to see his goat again soon.

While his family faced an uncertain road ahead, the Weber County community's support provided encouragement and

financial assistance during a difficult time. Since then, the young boy has received a heart transplant, and his family looks toward the future with hope.

A similar show of support took place in Salt Lake County, where a young 4-H member battling a rare form of cancer participated in the county livestock show. Despite the circumstances, he continued to find joy in his 4-H livestock projects.

When asked whether he preferred showing pigs or lambs, his answer was simple – he loves it all!



Weber Fair Story 2:

Tyttan Sappington shows Chomp Barela's goat alongside Chomp's sister at the Weber County Junior Livestock Show.

Photo by: Cheyanne Sorensen Photography.

At the Salt Lake County livestock auction, buyers and community members rallied around the young exhibitor, ultimately raising approximately \$15,000 through the sale of his animal.

The two stories are different, but they share a common thread: when young people need support, their 4-H communities show up.

“Sometimes a livestock sale becomes a whole lot more than selling an animal,” said Dave Francis, Utah 4-H director. “These moments remind us that 4-H is about so much more than what happens in the show ring. It is about the relationships young people build, the lessons they learn, and the communities that stand behind them.”

For 4-H members, livestock projects teach responsibility, animal care, record-keeping, work ethic, and perseverance. But the experiences also create friendships and connections that can last far beyond the fair.

The generosity displayed in Weber and Salt Lake counties is a reminder of what can happen when those connections come together. A goat can become a symbol of hope. An auction can become an opportunity to lift a family. And a livestock project can bring an entire community together around a young person.

About Utah 4-H

Utah 4-H is a youth development program of Utah State University Extension that empowers young people to develop leadership, confidence, responsibility, and life skills through hands-on learning experiences. Through clubs, projects, camps, competitions, and community experiences, Utah 4-H helps young people discover their passions and prepare for the future.

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