

Lindsay Marshall

### FFA/Livestock/Strawberry Festival

Every year, Durant's Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapters play an important role at the Strawberry Festival showcasing livestock. In the past, Durant has had participants in livestock competitions and Grand Champions, as well as students judging the events. This year, approximately 80 Durant students are participating, and they will miss on average three days of school a week for two weeks because of the Festival.

This year, freshman Rachel Schaub is judging dairy cows. The judging is in and of itself a competition, which entails numbering four cows with a "one" if they think that cow deserves first place and so on based on their appearance. Whoever comes closest to matching the results given by the real judges wins.

"I've shown pigs in the past," said Schaub. "You have to raise the pig for four or five months and you get judged on how the pig looks and your showmanship skills."

Grand Champion and Reserved Grand Champion are awarded prize money for their work with the cattle, swine, chickens, goats, lambs, and other livestock. The Showmanship Award is given to the student who the judge feels has best presented their animal in the show ring.

Another student who has shown pigs at the Strawberry Festival is senior Somer Harvey. Harvey has in the past won a Showmanship Award, Record Book Award, and was chosen as the Premier Exhibitor. This is her first year venturing into a new species of animal, as she is showing a heifer at both the State Fair and the Strawberry Festival.

"I believe showcasing livestock teaches students responsibilities that they will use throughout their life," said Harvey. "It is also an enjoyable time where students can get to know their animals and get to know other students around the state."

Some such responsibilities taught by showcasing livestock are learning how to take care of animals, feed animals, and keep records, according to agriculture teacher, Thomas Sturgis.

"Animal projects are an extension of classroom learning that causes students to improve their skills by competing against other exhibitors with their project animals," said Sturgis.

The Strawberry Festival's steer weigh-in for this year's show and sale was held at Durant High School on September 12, 2009. The steer had to weigh between 550 and 850 pounds at the initial weigh-in in September and must maintain a two-pound minimum weight gain every day up until check-in in March. There are about 55 Durant students entering steer into the competition.

Swine is another popular animal for competitions among Durant students, as eight are entering. Swine were chosen for this year's show through a drawing that took place on September 14, 2009. Out of all of the swine entries received, 75 were drawn to be shown at this year's Festival.

Students wishing to participate in either of these events were required to have at least a 2.5 grade point average and have to submit report cards with both the initial application and final entry.

"The students work hard throughout the year and this teaches them responsibility and leadership roles by exhibiting the animals," said agriculture teacher, Tim Cribbs.