

Youth Grassland Summit: Hands-On Education about Pasture Production

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Introduction

With 16% of Missouri's land in permanent pastureland, it is important to educate future farmers and agriculturalists about proper techniques and care. Missouri 4-H offers opportunities to learn about livestock and forage production, but youth enrollment in 4-H often ends during high years when students are offered a variety of other opportunities. Therefore, this workshop was created with the objective to educate area youth about grassland agriculture, the benefits of 4-H, and careers in agriculture.

Methods

MU Extension 4-H and agriculture specialists collaborated with area FFA advisors on educational curriculum. The one-day summit consisted of classroom instruction on the following topics:

- Management intensive rotational grazing
- Soil fertility and testing
- Livestock nutrition
- Plant identification
- Forage quality
- Plant growth
- Wildlife management

Hands on activities were incorporated to promote participant engagement, learning, and retention. The students practiced in soil sampling skills, plant identification, among other activities. At the conclusion of the summit, student participants and FFA advisors were surveyed on their experience.



Figure 1. Students participated in hands-on activities to learn about soil sampling (top), hay quality (middle), and a plant identification scavenger hunt (bottom).

Impact

- From year one to year two, participant numbers increased 42%.
- Students were able to learn from experts with careers in grasslands.
- After attending the Youth Grassland Summit, the West Plains FFA Grassland team placed third at the District Grassland Competition and qualified for the state competition.
- In the survey, 100% of FFA advisors who attended said the summit was a good use of time for their students and they would return if the workshop is offered again.
- *"I think it's a wonderful opportunity for our students to learn and apply the information they obtain. It seems students listen more when someone other than their teacher tells them."* ~John Doss, Koshkonong FFA Advisor.



Figure 2. In 2019, five area high schools attended the Youth Grassland Summit, for a total of 34 students.

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