

Winner Winner Chicken Dinner!

By Spencer Baz and Lily Kolbusz

Ever wonder what makes your chicken a good chicken? Students in Agriscience can tell you, after working on their Broiler Chicken Projects. Students raise and take care of a flock of chickens and bring the best chickens to competition. The students will be judged on their birds' feet, size, and uniformity within the flock.

“The project teaches students principles around feeding and nutrition, teaching proper husbandry, work ethic, and teamwork skills,” says Agriscience instructor Brain Matchett. Four teams were created and named by students; *B-dubs*, *Beef*, *Keeping up with the Karchickens*, and *Hot ones* competed in November in the Michigan Future Farmers of America (FFA) Broiler Chicken Contest. Team *Beef* came in 5th place and team *B-dubs* took second, only one point away from first.

The condition of a chicken's feet can reflect how clean the chicken's pens have been; the uniformity of a flock tells how well a flock was taken care of and fed; size and weight will determine its value as a market-ready chicken. At the end of the competition, students will have a market-ready and processed chicken.

You might wonder what processing is: well, for lack of better words, processing includes slaughtering, eviscerating, and vacuum sealing the chicken. All the processing at the competition is handled by the judges, but students learned how to process and will put their skills into practice at the school in November when a processing setup will be provided for the students. “[The project] helps students understand our food supply chain and how meat protein is grown for consumers,” Matchett said. In fact, second-year students often help the first-year students take care of their chickens and give them a few pointers.

“At first I was nervous about the butchering process, but now that I've been working with the chickens I feel more comfortable with the end result. Besides the butchering, I was excited to learn the process of raising them and managing them,” said Kingsley junior Gracie McPherson, a first-year student in Agriscience.