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It’s swine and dandy for a local family whose love of pigs will take the 4-H spotlight at this week’s Ozaukee County Fair

How does an 8-year-old girl manage to get a 250-pound hog to walk in a show ring and go where she wants it to go?

Very carefully — and with lots of advice from her cousins, uncles and grandfather.

It also helps to have a few marshmallows or other treats on hand and to spend lots of time with the animal prior to competing at the Ozaukee County Fair, which opened Wednesday, Aug. 1, and continues through Sunday, Aug. 5.

Paige Pierson of Fredonia is the youngest of the Kraus cousins who are showing hogs at the fair this year. Paige will show a hog named Luke that her cousin Kaylie Kraus, 11, has been grooming for the ring.

Kaylie’s brothers Colton, 16, and Chase, 14, and their cousins Tyler, 12, and Abby, 10, are also showing hogs at the fair.

Six-year-old cousins Kenna Pierson and Brody Kraus, who are Clover Bud 4-H members, plan to show hogs when they get older.

“We tell Brody, ‘Whatever you do, don’t say bacon or pork chops near the pigs,’ so of course he shouts, ‘Bacon,’ ‘Pork chops,’ and laughs,” Brody’s father Kurt said.

The 4-H competition was scheduled for 5:30 p.m. Wednesday. Paige, who is too young for the 4-H swine project, will participate in the Half-Pint Showmanship event at 2:30 p.m. Sunday.

Each 4-H member will choose a hog to be sold to the highest bidder in the 4-H Livestock Sale Thursday night.

The large animals were cute pigs weighing less than 85 pounds when their parents, Scott and Kevin Kraus and Michele Kraus Pierson, bought them from a Cedar Grove breeder.

“They’re still cute,” said Kaylie, who will be sad to say goodbye to her favorite hog Luke, who she claims was named for a favorite singer not her Uncle Luke.

Colton, Chase and Kaylie each have three hogs they raised on their grandparents Ken and Rosemary Kraus' farm on Lakeland Road in the Town of Saukville. They could only take two hogs each to the fair, so they chose the ones that gained the most weight and had the best conformation.

Tyler's and Abby's hogs were raised on their grandparents Larry and Mary Prinsen's farm on Palmer Road in the Town of Holland, where the family has been living since their house was destroyed by a fire July 5.

There are few people in the county more knowledgeable than the Kraus family when it comes to raising pigs. Ken's late father Henry Kraus raised pigs and was instrumental in organizing the Ozaukee County Pork Producers Association.

Ken helped his father raise pigs and his children, Kurt, Scott, Michele and Luke, showed hogs as 4-H projects. Now, his grandchildren benefit from his knowledge.

The children are a fount of knowledge about animals. The older boys will be quizzed about the care of their animals during their showmanship events.

Pigs can't sweat and they can sunburn, so that's why they like wallowing in mud, Kaylie explained.

The hogs on the Kraus farm are kept in a tree-shaded enclosure. Ken fashioned pens from cast off semitrailer and freezer bins. Because of the hot weather, he devised an automatic misting system that goes off every eight minutes. The timer is linked to a radio that plays music when the water starts so the pigs know when to head for the misting area.

"Pigs are the smartest animal," Abby said. Chase added that they're smarter than dogs.

Normally, the children would walk the pig almost every day to prepare for the fair, but on hot days they let them rest.

If a child gets confused and can't tell his animal from other pigs, all he or she has to do is look at the ear notches. When pigs are born, an ear is notched in such a way to identify the mother and the litter. Each pig also has an ear tag.

The animals were weighed in mid-April and again at the fair to determine the weight-of-gain winners, which is important for market animals.

"How you make money (as a pig farmer) is the fastest you get that pig to market the better so you don't have to continue feeding it," Scott said.

There is friendly competition between the cousins for the best swine pen decorations at the fair. The Kraus family has been Lakeview 4-H Club members for several generations, but Kurt's children Tyler and Abby belong to Jay Road 4-H.

The biggest change since the parents showed hogs is the type of animal shown.

“We used to get pigs off grandpa’s farm,” Scott said. “Now, there are special pigs bred for showing.”

The Kraus children are showing Hampshire hogs, which are mostly black with a white band over the shoulders, and red-and-white crossbred hogs. There are also Yorkshire pigs that are pink and red Duroc pigs.

Judges look for a sturdy hog that is almost square in width and depth.

“For a while, they were looking like Arnold Schwarzenegger with big, hard muscles,” Scott said. “Now, they want the muscle, but not the hard muscle.”

A hog looks best when its head is up, so the children hold a marshmallow high to get the animal to raise its head.

“You can hang things in the pen to tease them to get their heads up,” Colton said.

When the parents showed hogs, there were only eight or nine 4-H members in the swine project.

“Now, there are almost 90 members countywide in swine projects,” Scott said.

Scott and Luke each had grand champion hogs. Kurt, Michele and Tyler have had reserve champions.

Cousins gathered around Emily the hog included (front row, from left) Chase and Brody Kraus, Kenna and Paige Pierson, Tyler, Colton, (back row) Abby and Kaylie Kraus. Photo by Sam Arendt