Trying to catch and halter a wild and skittish calf doesn’t just take the speed of lightening but the strength of superwoman to hold on and maneuver a halter over its head.

That didn’t stop 12-year-old Emma Ferguson of Imperial. Despite the odds, 18 kids and only 10 calves, the big coliseum arena and being one of the youngest competitors, shea was able to catch her calf early on.

The National Western Stock Show Catch-a-Calf Contest is a favorite of rodeo audiences, who get to watch youngsters ages 12-18 do their best for an opportunity to care for and show a calf next year.

Youths who catch calves in the contest are eventually given a calf to take home and care for until the next year, when they bring the calf back to the National Western Stock Show and compete in a special beef class.

Once Emma receives her calf, she will be responsible for feeding and caring for the animal, keeping records about its health and care and writing regularly to contest sponsors, who donate the calves.

At the 2014 National Western Stock Show, she will show her calf and participate in a personal interview as well as be judged on her showmanship and record book.

“When 4-H’ers win a calf in the Catch-a-Calf contest, they learn basic business skills,” says Kimberly Cook, UNL Extension Educator.

“For example, they begin to understand how important it is to keep records and maintain a relationship with their business partners-in this case, the contest sponsors. They are also responsible for the well-being of an animal and gain interviewing and communication skills during the interview process which is part of the competition,” she said.

The program began in 1935 and grew to include 52 calves by 1942. Soon after World War II, the program settled at 40 calves per year.

Currently enrolled 4-H members from Colorado, western Kansas, western Nebraska and Wyoming may apply to participate in the contest.