

Good Management Practices for Youth

Animal Handling

Lindsay M. Chichester, Extension Educator

Dennis E. Bauer, Extension Educator

Dee Griffin, Extension Feedlot Veterinarian

Jessica G. Jones, Extension Educator

As a good and responsible livestock producer, you are providing excellent care for your animal on a full-time basis. Below are sound production practices to help your animal thrive in your care. In addition, a checklist has been provided to make sure you follow these guidelines prior to and while at fairs and other public exhibitions.

This is No. 7 in a series of seven documents on **good management practices for youth**. Copies of these documents, commonly asked questions, feed and water requirements, and many other animal care and well-being documents can be accessed at <http://4h.unl.edu/resourceanimalcare>.

Prior to Fair

If it is not possible for your animal to be permanently housed in an adequately sized area, it should have regular access to a larger area to exercise. This will help ensure your animal will not have mobility issues as it grows and develops.

Spend time with your animal. It needs to get to know you and become comfortable with you being around. Give your animal time to think about your movements, its surroundings, and what you are trying to get the animal to do. Try not to rush its learning experiences.

When you are working with your animal, whether in small or large spaces, you should follow low-stress handling guidelines. Understanding an animal's vision, hearing, flight zone, personal space, and point of balance will help you to reduce stress while handling your animal. Livestock have wide-angle vision and can be easily frightened by rapid movements, so when working with your animal, you should make slow deliberate movements. Loud noises (including yelling and whistling) can be stressful to animals so those noises should be avoided. Some signs that your animal (depending on the

species) may be frightened or uncomfortable could include erect head or ears, movement away from you, aggressiveness (kicking, pawing, or charging), large eyes, or the animal may make distressed noises. When communicating with your animal, you should use a soft voice.

An animal's flight zone is its "personal space" and if you enter it, the animal will move away from you. The more you work with your animal, the smaller the animal's flight zone will become, making it less stressful on the animal and easier for you to work with it. Animals and humans all have "fight or flight" characteristics. Rapid, sudden movements, loud noises, and entering into an animal's flight zone can cause stress for an animal. If your animal becomes excited, it may take up to 20-30 minutes for it to calm down! By using low-stress handling techniques, you can develop trust with your animal, which will minimize its fight and flight characteristics.

An animal's point of balance is located at its shoulder (pigs, sheep, and cattle). If you stand behind this point, the animal will move forward. If you stand in front of the point of balance, the animal will back up. Understanding how the animal moves will make it easier for you to move it to where you want it to go.

When you first start working with your animal, you may need to use some tools to help move it until you get used to each other. Some of these tools include pig or cattle paddles, nylon flags, pig boards, plastic ribbons tied to the end of a stick, chutes, and gates. Try to never use an electric prod or hit your animal to make it move. This will only frighten it more and cause greater stress.

Teaching an animal to lead by a halter should be done when the animal is younger and at a lighter weight. The animal will need time to adjust to the halter. A good technique for haltering is a pressure and release system. Pulling on the halter will put pressure behind the animal's ears and under its jaw. When the animal takes a step, stop pulling on the halter, thus releasing the pressure. An animal will soon learn that when

it moves in the direction you are asking it to move, there is no pressure from the halter, and the experience is a good one.

Keep in mind that your animal may be used to the surroundings and settings at home, but it will not be familiar with the environment when you take it to fair. Prior to fair you should try to expose your animal to a variety of new environmental conditions that will help prepare it for what it may experience at fair. For example, you could expose your animal to music, small children, other animals (same and different species), vehicles, and loud noises. By trying to expose your animal to new things prior to fair, you will be eliminating some stress on both you and your animal at the fair.

As a good youth producer, I know that prior to fair my animal has received:

- plenty of time with me to learn what we must do together at the fair,
- adequate space to move around and exercise to stretch its limbs,
- quiet and deliberate movements during handling,
- low-stress handling methods, thus building trust between my animal and myself, and
- exposure to a variety of new (and potentially frightening) sights and sounds it may experience at fair.

While at Fair

At home, your animal may be used to having an adequately sized area in which it can move about all day. At fair, animals are generally housed in a tie-stall or small pen. You should take your animal to an empty area or large space (if applicable) and let it run loose or walk it around for several minutes. This helps your animal get some exercise and burn off some stored energy, which will make its behavior more desirable at the fair.

While at fair you may see a problem with the facilities that the fair officials have not noticed, such as a slick floor, a

broken or leaking water hydrant, or a pile of used bedding in a common walk area that is spooking your animal. As a livestock producer and livestock owner, you should let the fair officials know about this concern so they can quickly fix the problem to make the fair and the facilities the safest and most efficient they can be for you and your animal. In addition, you may see other youth livestock producers who are not following the best management practices. As a responsible youth producer, you should openly and honestly discuss good management practices with these persons and share with them tips and techniques to improve their livestock management skills.

As a good youth producer, I know that at fair my animal has received:

- the opportunity to exercise and burn off excessive energy,
- quiet and deliberate movements during handling, and
- the best possible care at the fair facilities.

By following these guidelines prior to and during fairs and exhibitions, you can minimize stress on yourself and your animal. In return, your animal will not only perform better, but also will behave better. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have provided the best possible care for your animal.

Annually, Nebraska's youth are required to complete Quality Assurance (QA) training. Quality Assurance is a program that educates youth about the best management practices for livestock production. In addition, it was developed to assure consumers that the food products produced from animals are wholesome and safe, and that the animals that produced the product were cared for properly. In 2012, this training also was made available online for 4-H and FFA members at three different age levels: Junior (8-10); Intermediate (11-14); and Senior (15-18). More information about the Nebraska Youth QA Program can be found at <http://4h.unl.edu/qualityassurance>.

This publication has been peer reviewed.

UNL Extension publications are available online at <http://extension.unl.edu/publications>.

Index: Animals, General Management

Issued June 2012

Extension is a Division of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln cooperating with the Counties and the United States Department of Agriculture.

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension educational programs abide with the nondiscrimination policies of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.

© 2012, The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska on behalf of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension. All rights reserved.