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 surround-
ings 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 be-
  tween my animal and myself, and
- exposure to a variety of new (and potentially frighten-
  ing) sights and sounds it may experience at fair.

While at Fair

At home, your animal may be used to having an ade-
quately 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 devel-
oped 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 informa-
tion about the Nebraska Youth QA Program can be found
at http://4h.unl.edu/qualityassurance.

This publication has been peer reviewed.

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at http://extension.unl.edu/publications.

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