

Animal Care Resource Guide for 4-H and FFA Members

Commonly Asked Questions

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Fair livestock exhibitors often are asked questions about animal well-being and care. This publication provides talking points to help youth prepare answers. This is No. 2 in a series of five resource guides.

As an exhibitor and livestock producer, you are aware that the public will develop opinions about production agriculture based on what they see, hear, and perceive at livestock fairs and exhibitions. The practices you use to prepare and show your animal may be all the public ever sees of livestock production, so please set a good example.

As a fair exhibitor, you may be asked questions about animal well-being and care. This publication provides talking points that will help you prepare answers to commonly asked questions.

Why do you remove horns, castrate, and trim beaks?

- Practices such as these protect the animals from injuring each other, and help us produce high quality and nutritious food.
- When we perform these tasks we make sure to use proper techniques and equipment.
- Castration decreases fighting between intact males, and increases worker safety.

Do tagging, ear notching, and branding hurt the animal?

- Only briefly. The skin heals quickly, then no longer causes pain and/or discomfort.
- These methods are used to identify animals to ensure appropriate recordkeeping is done if they become ill.
- These methods also are a means of identifying ownership if an animal becomes lost or stolen.
- Branding may be mandatory in some states (even in some parts of Nebraska) as a permanent means of identifying livestock.

Why are some farm animals confined?

- Any animal that is restricted to a certain area by a parameter fence or structure is confined.
- Raising farm animals in confinement helps us contain them so we can provide appropriate care and ensure they are in a safe and clean environment. This helps us produce high quality food products and minimize environmental risks.
- Confinement allows us to better use resources and available land.
- Confinement helps protect animals from many parasites and/or predators.

Why are antibiotics used on farms?

- Antibiotics are used to treat and/or control bacterial infections (as per new FDA direction (GD 209 & 213)). Proper care demands that animal diseases be controlled, and many animal diseases cannot be prevented or controlled by vaccinations. Antibiotics become the only option for controlling some animal diseases. Proper care also demands that sick animals are treated for their illness. If the disease is caused by bacteria, antibiotic use is frequently the only alternative to alleviate their suffering. It is important to keep farm animals healthy in order to produce high quality food products.
- Livestock exhibitors should work with a veterinarian to create a health program for their animals. The program should include appropriate vaccinations and protocols for how to care for an animal should it suffer an injury or a disease. The veterinarian can guide the exhibitor in responsible antibiotic use.
- Livestock exhibitors must also follow the withdrawal date listed to ensure a safe and wholesome product for the food supply.

Why are growth hormones used in animals?

- The use of growth hormones ensures animals are getting the most from their diets, reducing the land required to raise their feed. They also finish at younger ages, meeting export verifications of some countries.
- Growth hormones are not used in all animals.

Why are animals taught to lead?

- Leading makes animals easier to handle and more manageable in small areas.
- Teaching animals to lead also helps ensure the safety of the youth exhibitor and the audience.

Why do you use canes and show sticks to move animals at the fair?

- They enable youth to move animals more safely and to comfort them.
- Mistreatment of any animal is not tolerated and is addressed promptly if observed or suspected.

What is the purpose of showing livestock?

- The exhibition of livestock at a show gives the youth exhibitor a chance to showcase skills to their peers and a judge.
- The youth exhibitor can learn various livestock husbandry skills such as livestock breeding and selection, feed and nutrition, health and performance, and overall well-being.

Why are these animals bathed and groomed? Does this normally happen to farm animals?

- Animals are bathed and groomed at fair to showcase them in the best manner, showing off their genetic potential and making them more aesthetically appealing to judges and visitors.
- By making animals more appealing, persons who may be interested in purchasing seedstock (breeding) animals from a certain family/farm will be able to see the animal at its best.
- Animals are generally not bathed and groomed at home.

Does shearing or clipping hurt the animal?

- No, it is like getting a haircut; hair and wool quickly grow back.
- Animals get used to the sound and the sensation, and they are not frightened by the experience.

Are animals confined at their farms where they are raised?

- It depends on the species; on-farm animals usually have larger spaces or access to larger spaces

- Poultry, swine, and rabbits are more generally found in smaller spaces
- Cattle, sheep, goats, and horses are usually housed in larger spaces
- The size of an animal's space depends on how many animals an exhibitor has, how large the animals are, and how active the animals are.

Why are they confined at the show?

- Exhibitors and fair visitors are protected from animals frightened by unfamiliar people, noises, and surroundings.

How old are animals when they are harvested for meat?

- It depends on the animal. For example:

<i>Species</i>	<i>Approximate Age at Harvest</i>	<i>Approximate Weight at Harvest</i>
Beef cattle	13 to 30 months	1,000 to 1,500 pounds
Dairy – veal calves	3 days to 3 weeks	150 pounds
Goat	5 to 7 months	50 to 110 pounds
Poultry	30 to 60 days	3 to 6 pounds
Rabbit	9 to 11 weeks	4.5 to 6.5 pounds
Sheep	5 to 7 months	110 to 150 pounds
Swine	5 to 7 months	225 to 300 pounds

Do animals need protection from inclement weather?

- It is the obligation of livestock producers to provide the best care and protection of animals.
- Animals may need a structure or a place to get out of very hot or cold temperatures, wind, hail, or other extreme weather conditions.
- Animals exposed to extreme weather conditions require more food for their body's maintenance and, therefore, more land for growing their feed. These stressful conditions also increase the risk of many possible diseases.
- 4-H and FFA animal comfort requirements are generally very different than human comfort requirements. For example, the comfort temperature range for cattle and sheep is about 15 to 30 degrees cooler than humans because of the way they digest their food.

Do animals prefer to be alone or with other animals?

- Animals like livestock are generally social and like to have companionship, and they may be more comfortable if similar species animals are within proximity.
- Sometimes animals that are smaller or weaker are pushed away from food, water, or shelter when they are confined together with larger animals. A watchful eye should be kept to ensure all animals remain healthy.

How much water do animals drink?

- Approximate daily water intake per animal. Note these are average values and do not factor in extremes temperatures.

<i>Species</i>	<i>Average Water Requirements</i>	<i>Average Water Requirements in Summer Months (90°F)</i>	<i>Average Water Requirements in Winter Months (40°F)</i>
Finishing beef cattle (1,000 pounds)	10 gallons	20.5 gallons	9 gallons
Lactating beef cows (1,100 pounds)	11 gallons	22 gallons	12 gallons
Dry beef cows, bred beef cows, and beef heifers	10 gallons	14.5 gallons	6 gallons
Mature beef bulls (1,600+ pounds)	16 gallons	20.6 gallons	8.7 gallons
Finishing pigs (100-250 pounds)	3 to 5 gallons	—	—
Lactating sows	2.5 to 7 gallons	—	—
Non-pregnant sow/gilt	3.2 gallons	—	—
Boars	5 gallons	—	—
Feeder lambs	1.5 gallons	—	—
Lactating ewe	2 gallons	—	—
Dry ewe	2 gallons	—	—
Rams	2 gallons	—	—
Dry dairy cow (6-9 months pregnant)	24-27 gallons	—	—
Milking dairy cow	20-35 gallons	—	—
Weanling (650 pounds)	6-8 gallons	—	—
Lactating mare (1,100 pounds)	10-15 gallons	—	—
Working horse (1,100 pounds), moderate work	10-12 gallons	—	—

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Resources

For more information on animal care and well-being, visit 4h.unl.edu/resourceanimalcare or contact:

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