

## CARING FOR YOUR ANIMAL BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE FAIR

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Animal shows, 4-H fairs and other exhibitions where animals are on display for the public are common in New England, and across the nation, and are the only direct contact that most urban dwellers have with farmers or farm animals. It is therefore extremely important that what they see and experience is the best we have to offer in terms of animal care and management. Exhibitors must be knowledgeable and be able to provide accurate, science based information about the animals under their care.

Proper care and management starts the moment the animal comes under your care. This includes transportation from the point of purchase to its home at your farm, facility or home. Best management practices for housing and environment, feeding, health care and biosecurity, and transportation must be followed for each species of animal under your care. For farm animals, the local extension agent or extension specialist at the university will be able to provide this information for you. For pet animals such as dogs or cats, the breed associations for each are usually good sources of information on their care.

Animals that are in less than top condition should not be put on public display. Some animals that are in very good production condition, such as dairy cattle, may look bony or skinny to the uneducated public and care must be taken to explain in precise terms that while the animal may look underfed it is actually quite healthy and a good producer of milk.

The welfare of the animal should be the primary concern of all who care for animals, which means that the basic needs of the animal in terms of social and physical environment and housing, nutrition and health care are being met. This will be the case if best management practices are being followed.

Youth preparing an animal for show must be taught the proper techniques of fitting so the animal will not be injured in the process. Halter training, trimming hair or wool, hoof and foot care, etc., are practices that may be perceived by the general public as stressful to the animal, which is true if they are not done properly. When these practices are being performed in a public place, such as in a show barn, be sure that a knowledgeable spokesperson is available to explain to the public what is being done and why, and how this is not harming the animal.

Show barn management should regularly check to be sure that exhibitors allow proper space for each animal, are using the correct form of restraint, and animals are kept clean and properly bedded to ensure their comfort. In hot weather, proper ventilation should be provided. They should also check to be sure all animals are being regularly fed and watered. They should also be alert for any management and care practices of the exhibitors that are unacceptable.

Show barn managers and exhibitors should be prepared for dealing with animal activists. Our concern is the welfare of the animal, not animal rights. We believe that animals should be properly cared for, but they are animals, not humans, and should not be compared with humans relative to social, environmental, and nutritional needs. Again, a qualified spokesperson should be available at each event to help explain to the public the purpose of the show and how the welfare of the animal is the primary concern.

Avoid confrontation. If someone asks excessive questions, especially about how you feel about eating your pet, etc., and is taking a lot of pictures of the animals, barns, exhibitors, then the spokesperson or law enforcement should be contacted immediately and let them deal with the person. Remember, not all people who are asking questions are animal activists, some may just be truly curious about what you are doing and you should treat them with courtesy and respect and explain the care and management afforded your animals.