

Conducting a Successful Livestock Show for Youth¹

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Introduction

Young people who participate in livestock projects gain valuable knowledge and skills, leadership, and personal development (Boleman et al. 2005). The livestock show or fair where youth exhibit their animals serves as the educational summit of the project experience and allows youth exhibitors to showcase the product of their labor and experiential learning (Rusk and Machtmes 2003; Rusk et al. 2003; Boleman et al. 2005). Obviously, market animal projects for exhibition are raised differently than market animals in large-scale commercial production systems. However, youth shows serve as the average American's window into animal agriculture and as a medium to educate the public about how American meat-animal production helps to feed the world.

To ensure that livestock shows for youth will continue to be viable, the following two guiding principles should be used in every decision made. The entire event should be as:

1. Stress-free as possible for the animals, youth exhibitors, their families, and show management; and
2. Educational as possible for youth exhibitors, their families, and all public spectators.

Show management should use the following points when planning the event to ensure the two guiding principles are met:

- Select an appropriate judge
- Communicate the show schedule
- Set up the facility to minimize stress and facilitate education
- Ensure safety
- Manage volunteers

Select an Appropriate Judge

The future of livestock shows for youth is directly related to the judges who are selected to evaluate exhibitors and their projects. Below is a list of qualities to look for when selecting the judge for your show:

- **Knowledge and ability to evaluate animals:** Judges should select animals with excellent carcass merit that appear to be young, fast growing and easy to raise.
- **Integrity:** Obviously, select judges with the highest level of morals and ethics.
- **Credibility/experience:** Many county shows can select younger, more inexperienced judges, provided they have adequate training. Larger county and all regional and state shows should select judges with extensive experience.
- **Teaching and speaking ability:** Select judges who can not only describe the animals' differences but also teach the exhibitors and spectators about the positives

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and negatives of the traits described using terminology everyone can understand.

- **Industry understanding:** Judges in states with little commercial meat-animal finishing, like the State of Florida, must possess an excellent understanding of how large-scale commercial livestock production occurs in order to maximize a show's educational value.
- **Interest in youth development:** Many individuals can do an excellent job placing the livestock, but some might not engage the youth. Use judges who are genuinely interested in youth programming.

Develop a list of judges who fit your criteria. For suggestions of possible judges, contact other livestock show managers, livestock breed associations, or universities/Extension offices.

Specifically, Florida fairs can look to the list of judges willing to judge Florida fairs at <https://animal.ifas.ufl.edu/extension/youth/livestock/livestock-judges/>.

Show management should have a second choice of judge in mind prior to contacting the individual selected as first choice. Also, have all the show logistics ready to share with the judge, including:

- Date and time of show
- Location and venue setup (indoor vs. outdoor)
- Expected length of show and number of animals
- General description of show day including what the judge will be responsible for evaluating (breeding vs. market vs. showmanship or all)
- Pay and travel expenses.

Send a letter to the judge one to two months before the show with show details, the schedule, your contact information, and any other additional details. Call the judge one week before the show to check in and see if he has any questions. It may also be helpful to exchange phone numbers so that the judge and show organizer can reach each other on the day of the event.

Communicate the Show Schedule

Show managers need to do an excellent job communicating all facets of the event with exhibitors and their families. Points to consider for communicating the show schedule include:

Before the Show

- Post the schedule online at least 45 days in advance.

- Make sure the schedule is clear and easy to understand.
- Set a start time and end time for registration and/or weigh-in.
- Inform exhibitors and families in advance what is needed for proper check-in.
- Communicate with all show volunteers, including when and where they will be needed, their responsibilities, etc.

At the Show

- Post show and showmanship order as soon as possible.
- Make copies of programs for families and the public if you can afford it.
- Hold an exhibitor meeting prior to the start of the show to ensure everyone understands what will be expected of them.
- Make announcements both 15 minutes before the show starts and 5 minutes before the show starts.
- If possible, have each class line up while the previous class is presented to keep the show moving and facilitate an enjoyable viewing experience.

General Suggestions

- Be consistent and firm on deadlines and rules.
- Build extra time into the show schedule to keep the event running on time.
- Always refer to established rules as justification for decisions if there are any complaints.

Set Up the Facility to Minimize Stress and Facilitate Education

The following is a list that management should consider for penning or stalling animals within the barn:

- Make sure exhibitors are able to find out where their animals should go prior to unloading.
- Be cognizant of weather extremes if penning animals in a tent or temporary structure.
- Ensure there is adequate space if planning to place two pigs, sheep, or goats in pens.
- Ensure all animals within the barn have access to water at all times.

The show ring must be set up to allow spectators to see easily and should be large enough to allow the animal to be exhibited at its best. The following are guidelines to use for setting up the show ring:

- Use gates and panels that are easy for spectators to see through.
- Use panels that are no more than 5 or 6 feet tall.
- Cover the surface with sawdust, wood chips, dirt, or indoor-outdoor carpet.
- Dampen the show ring to minimize dust.
- Have a holding area/make-up ring adjacent to the show ring, which will greatly improve the speed and efficiency of the show.
- Have separate entrance and exit gates for the show ring to minimize congestion.
- Have two microphones, one for the judge and another for the barn to call the upcoming class.
- Make sure that approximately 8 linear feet is provided to display a yearling beef animal on a profile view.
- Use the 8 linear feet to place at least two sheep or goats on a profile view.

Thus, a 40' X 20' ring would allow 5 market weight steers or 10–12 sheep or goats to profile on one side of the arena or 15 market weight steers or 30–36 sheep or goats to make a single-filed circle around the ring.

Additional information specific to facilities for swine shows is described in Carr et al. (2011) *Best Practice Checklist for Management of a Swine Show for Youth*, available at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/an274>.

Ensure Safety

Beef animals with poor dispositions or inadequate or ineffective halterbreaking are a safety hazard to exhibitors, spectators, and other animals. If beef animals are unmanageable and pose a safety risk, they should not be allowed to exhibit.

Kansas State University has developed a safety audit, online lessons, and videos addressing youth livestock safety, available at <https://bae.k-state.edu/extension/fs/khot/resources/KSRE%20Youth%20Livestock%20Safety%20Videos.html>.

Manage Volunteers

Any livestock show for youth requires a lot of work, most of which is done by volunteers. Show management should identify people who are willing to help and whose main goal is to help the young people. Show management should assign volunteers to duties that maximize their skill set.

A large show with more than 10 animals per class will require 12 to 16 people just to manage the show ring. More

volunteers are needed for a swine show (to help with herding pigs) than for shows featuring haltered species or small ruminants. Below is a list of jobs and the number of people needed at those positions for most livestock shows:

Holding Area/Make-Up Ring

- Ring worker/board handlers (1–3)
- Holding area announcer (1)
- In-gate to holding area (1)
- In-gate from holding area to show ring (1)

Show Ring

- Ring worker/board handlers (2–4)
- Judge (1)
- Announcer (1)
- Announcer helper (1)
- Placings recorder (1)
- Awards helper (1)
- Ring manager (1)

As stated earlier, you should correspond with as many of your prospective volunteers as possible before arriving at the show. Show management should educate all volunteers on the nuances of their duties and graciously thank them for their help.

Conclusions

Every facet of a livestock show for youth should work toward making the event as stress-free as possible for the animals, youth exhibitors, and their families, and as educational as possible for youth exhibitors, their families, and public spectators. The event will surely be a success if show management uses the two principles mentioned in this document as a guide for every decision made.

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