

Massachusetts 4-H Youth Development Program Leader's Guide on Animal Welfare for Fairs, Exhibitions and Shows

There have been reports of protests, violence and vandalism at public venues where animals are involved such as fairs and dog shows. Such situations can occur when individuals with strong beliefs related to animal rights and/or animal welfare inappropriately confront or question youth related to animal care. We do not want 4-H youth to be put in an uncomfortable situation or one in which they feel threatened. This piece is provided to 4-H volunteers and parents who are expected to educate and prepare 4-H members.

4-H and Animal Science Projects

4-H animal science projects teach youth important life skills such as responsibility, teamwork, critical thinking, sportsmanship and positive attitudes of self-worth. Members also learn about the science of their project animal including anatomy and physiology, veterinary science and nutrition, just to name a few examples. As animal owners, 4-H members are responsible to care for their animals, providing appropriate food and shelter while ensuring the animals are not subjected to unnecessary pain, suffering and excessive stress. 4-H members take pride in the fact that they believe in animal welfare as the right thing to do and they take their responsibility to care for their animals seriously.

Animal Welfare and Animal Rights

There is a difference between animal welfare and animal rights. According to the Youth Guide on Animal Welfare for Fairs and Exhibitions from Nebraska Extension, animal welfare is a belief that people have a responsibility to treat animals with respect and to care for them and that humans may raise animals for benefit such as food, clothing, work or companionship. Animal rights is a philosophy in which animals have the same (or similar) rights as humans and it is not acceptable to use animals for human benefit for food, clothing and companionship.

4-H Leader Responsibility

As the 4-H Club Leader you must make sure that your club members are learning the proper care and handling of animals. 4-H has curricula available to assist you with this. Enforce animal welfare policies in your club and address any problems that you encounter. Take a look at past practices and evaluate them carefully. For example, one 4-H Fair has been doing a sheep obstacle course for years and they are eliminating this event. Feel free to contact your 4-H Educator for any assistance that you need.

Educate the Public

Consider fairs and shows an opportunity to educate the public about proper animal care. For example, dog project members understand the importance of dog crates, especially at dog shows, but many in the general public do not. The general public usually does not understand why fitting stands are used. Encourage your club members to make posters or create exhibits that will inform the public about how members care for animals and why specific equipment is used.

Be Prepared and Prepare Your Club Members

Make sure that your members understand that most people are interested in what they do and why they do it and will ask questions. Encourage them to interact with the public (as they are able to) and talk to people about why they are in 4-H, how they care for their animals and the skills they are developing. Inform them they should never argue with people or get into any kind of confrontation. Members need to know that if they feel uncomfortable about questions that a person is asking, the attitude that person is displaying or action that he/she is taking, they should immediately get adult help. There should be a

protocol at the fair or show so that the member and parent knows what adult to go to for help if the leader is not available.

Resources

For additional information you may go to the following resources:

Youth Guide on Animal Welfare for Fairs and Exhibitions from Nebraska Extension;
http://4h.unl.edu/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=881f9db5-8bc0-412d-b130-d860f8fec5f7&groupId=466759

Leaders' Guide on Animal Welfare for Fairs and Exhibitions from OSU and the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation;
http://4hansci.osu.edu/livestock/documents/LeaderGuideAnimWelfare09_000.pdf

Telling Your Story from Dairy Management, Inc.;;
<http://www.dairyfarmingtoday.org/Learn-More/MythsvsFacts/Pages/MythCowsAreJustMachines.aspx>