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MISSISSIPPI AGRICULTURAL &  
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## Publications

### Preparing To Show Your Dairy Animal

Few other activities in the 4-H dairy project have more potential for educational and personal development of youth as do the 4-H dairy shows. These shows play a major role in helping youth become self-directed, productive, and contributing adult citizens by developing valuable life skills. These skills are more than physical skills -- they are a combination of acting, thinking, and feeling.

Showing an animal helps a young person in the maturing process -- developing responsibility and sportsmanship. Shows help youth learn to function as adults in society and to accept responsibilities, gain an ability to communicate, ask questions, solve problems, make decisions, and to work with other people. The experiences of your owning and working with animals, being responsible for their care, health, and growth, and exhibiting them in a competitive environment are tremendous assets in the character-

building process.

This publication was developed to provide 4-H members with guidelines in preparing dairy animals for showing. Providing these guidelines in a booklet form makes the information more accessible and useful.

## **Selecting a Good Animal**

To do your best at the 4-H dairy shows, you need to start with the correct type of animal. If you start with a poor calf, you can easily become discouraged. If you have more than one animal to select from, you need to select the best. When buying a calf, purchase the best you can afford. Birth dates are important when buying or breeding for show calves. The beginning dates for the various classes are March 1, June 1, September 1, and December 1. Any heifer born in March, June, September, or December, therefore, usually has an advantage over animals born later in the 3-month period. Short-aged animals are usually at a disadvantage until maturity.

It is most important to select heifers with good conformation. If you are not familiar with determining which animals are of good type, consult with someone who has knowledge in this area. The following tips will help you in selecting an animal to show:

- The animal needs to be long, stretchy, and of good size for her age and breed.

- It should have sharp, clean withers; a straight, strong back; a long, level, wide rump; and feet and legs with correct set.
- The heifer needs to show promise of outstanding udder development and have well-placed teats that hang plumb.
- It should have a good spring of rib and be deep in the chest and rear flank.
- Your animal needs to be the offspring of a proven bull with high PTA milk and type and out of a cow possessing good type with above-average production.

A good animal does not guarantee success in the showring; but without a good animal, it is difficult to consistently do well.

### **Blanketing the Animal**

Fitting an animal for a blanket when the weather is cool is more difficult than when the weather is warm. The hair of the animal stands up to aid the animal in reducing the stress of cool weather. For your animal to look its best at the show, blanket it for about 6 weeks.

Before you blanket the animal, give her a good bath. Select a warm day, or move the animal inside out of the wind. Wet her with water and lather her well, scrubbing with a brush. Avoid getting water in her ears; rinse well, and let her dry.

Burlap bags sewn together make a good blanket; commercial fabrics also are available for blankets. Be sure

the blanket is large enough for the animal. It should be tied in four places -- around the brisket, under the heart girth, and around the rear legs. Blanket patterns are available at your county Extension office.

It is best to make long straps that can be tied in a bow so they can be untied easily and adjusted as needed. **Do not** tie the blanket too tight. If the straps are too tight, the animal will be uncomfortable when she lies down or else the straps will be pulled loose. Keep the blanket on at all times except when brushing. Brush the animal vigorously each day to remove hair.

An alternative to blanketing an animal is body clipping, which, if done properly, can achieve the same results as with a blanket. Clip when the animal's hair is excessively long and blanketing is not feasible. Clip at least 2 to 4 weeks before the dairy show. This amount of time allows the hair to grow to a length that will lie against the skin instead of standing up.

Take care when clipping during extremely cold weather. Small animals may need to be blanketed or housed to protect them from cold stress. You should also remember to protect clipped animals when transporting them in cold weather.

### **Feeding the Show Animal**

The nutritional needs of your show animal are of major

importance. If an animal's nutrient needs are not met, it will not grow at an acceptable rate and, therefore, will be smaller than other animals in the show class. Feed your animal a balanced ration throughout the year.

A good ration is built around high-quality forage. Feed heifers all the good-quality hay they will eat. If you are feeding by hand, give hay at least two times a day.

Remember that good hay helps in rumen development, which shows up on the animal as a deep body with a good spring of rib. Most exhibitors prefer a good, green, leafy grass hay; however, if you have a choice of legume hay and poor grass hay, feed the legume. Sudangrass or millet, cut in the boot stage, makes excellent hay for show animals. If you don't have good hay on your farm, it is worth the effort to find an adequate supply of quality forage. Show calves must have good hay, or they will not develop properly and will be shallow-bodied.

Feed hay in a rack, preferably out of the rain. If you do not have a hay rack, much of the hay will be wasted.

Most all the forage grown in Mississippi must be supplemented with grain to provide a balanced ration for your animals. Feed your animal so she will be thrifty and dairy-like at show time -- not too thin and not too fat.

You can best control your heifer's body condition by the amount of grain fed. If your animal is in good condition, she will need very little grain. On the other hand, if she is thin

and in poor condition, she may need 6 or 8 pounds of grain per day. Some heifers gain much more rapidly than others.

Good, fitting rations are light and not too high in protein. A good home-mixed fitting ration that contains about 14 percent crude protein can be with the following items:

- 1,340 pounds ground shelled corn
- 300 pounds 44 percent soybean meal
- 300 pounds crimped oats
- 30 pounds limestone
- 15 pounds trace mineral salt
- 13 pounds dicalcium phosphate
- 2 pounds vitamins A,D,E supplement

Before you take your animal to the show, teach her to eat and drink from the same pails you will use at the show. Your animal must have plenty of clean water available at all times.

### **Importance of Brushing**

Brush your show animals at least once a day. You can brush the animal with a soft brush, then rub it with your hands to remove loose hair. New hair comes in short, soft, and silky. Daily brushing can make your animal take on a new look.

After you brush and observe your heifer a few days, you may see the need to increase the thickness of your blanket. The purpose of the blanket or body clipping and the brush is to remove the long hair.

Most showmanship classes include fitting as one of the selection criteria. You want your animal to have a soft, silky hair coat, which is accomplished by blanketing or body clipping the animal and brushing often. It is easy on show day to identify those animals on a daily brushing schedule. They have finer texture and more gloss to their hair coats than do the animals not brushed regularly; extra brushing pays off on show day.



### **Trimming Feet of Show Animals**

Properly trimmed feet are important. If the toes are long and unshapely, trim them early in the conditioning period. Trim at least 2 weeks before the first show. Heifers with long toes tend to walk on the backs of their heels, detracting from the appearance of the legs.

The feet of calves and heifers are much easier to trim than a cow's feet, because they are easier to restrain and the hoof is softer. Your heifer can easily be thrown with a couple of half-hitches in a long cotton rope. The toes can be trimmed with hoof nippers.

Trimming feet of mature cows is a job for someone with experience. One method is to use a sharp, 1-inch wood chisel as the animal stands on a 2-inch-thick board. Experienced trimmers attempt to remove excess toe and sole growth to get the cow forward on her toes and to reduce heel compression. A balanced hoof is important.

It is important to avoid making the hoof bleed. If this does happen, the animal may limp for a few days. This is why you need to trim at least 2 weeks before show date.

### **Clipping Show Animals**

Clipping is one of the most important things you can do to fit your animal. Clipping improves the animal's style and overall appearance. All dairy animals are basically clipped the same way; however, study each animal before clipping and determine if you can improve her weak points by clipping her a certain way.

All 4-H'ers showing dairy animals should learn to clip their animals. You will need to have an experienced person teach you by example and then coach you as you try it. It is a good idea to practice on animals you do not plan to show. Until you have mastered the art of clipping, clip slowly. Hair

can always be taken off, but clipping too much cannot be corrected. It is rare that an animal needs to be body clipped entirely. Clip such animals at least 60 days before the show to allow a new coat to grow back.

Most animals do not appreciate clipping. It may be necessary to use a nose lead to pull their heads to a post to prevent them from hitting you when swinging their heads. Placing the animal in a grooming chute makes her easier to handle, and clipping goes faster. Blueprints for building grooming chutes are available from your county Extension office.

Clip the head, neck, ears, tail, and udder (cows and springing heifers only). Other parts of the animal can be clipped on an "as-needed" basis. Clip the front and rear legs so as to have the appearance of greater flatness of bone and to remove stains. Trim toplines to improve straightness. Clip the withers to a sharp point to improve angularity. Body clipping is acceptable, especially when the body hair is excessively long. Do not clip the belly and udder of heifers that have not calved and are not springing.

Most people start clipping with the head. Clip the entire head and neck as short as possible. This is accomplished by clipping against the hair. Leave the whiskers on the nose because this makes the muzzle appear wider. Clip the inside and outside of the ears. Blend the neck and shoulders by clipping in the direction the hair runs. Start at

the point of shoulder, and clip upward to the top of the shoulder blade. Use the clippers to make the point of withers as sharp as possible.

Clipping the tail and tailhead area is easier, and some people prefer to start here. Clip the tail from a point about 4 inches above the hairs on the switch. Clip against the hair on the tail until you reach the tailhead. Blend the longer hair and close-clipped area at the point where the tail lies over the pinbones. You can blend the clipper lines by clipping with the hair. Don't clip all the hair off the topline. If the topline is not level, clip the high areas and blend these into the lower sections of the topline.

Every clipping rule recommended for a heifer can be applied to a milking animal. Animals that have freshened will need additional clipping. Clip the udder as close as possible, then clip along the milk veins to make them more noticeable. Clip the belly area between the milk veins. Blend all clipper marks, using the natural body lines to help hide them. It is easier to clip a full udder, and you are less apt to cut the skin with the clippers when the udder is full.



## **Training Animals To Lead and Pose**

It is best to begin with a rope halter when breaking an animal to lead. Tie the animal in a well-bedded place, and do not lead much in the first couple of days. This allows the animal to get accustomed to the halter and to learn you are not going to hurt her. It is best to tie the animal to a wall with a smooth surface so the animal will learn to respect the halter without injuring itself.

You can begin to teach your show animal to lead by leading it to water twice daily. Within a few days you may begin to take it out for short periods of time. A few minutes each day is better than long sessions several days apart.

After the animal is broken to lead, train it to walk and pose properly. Use a dairy show halter with a chain for this exercise. Train the animal to walk slowly and with short steps with its head carried high. Always lead your animal in a clockwise manner; this puts you on the outside of the circle.

The preferred method of leading is walking forward at a normal pace. You should walk opposite the head on the left side, holding the lead strap with the right hand close to the halter and the strap neatly, but naturally (preferably not coiled), gathered in one or both hands. Holding close to the halter or with one hand inside the halter ensures a more secure control of the animal.

As the judge studies your animal, the preferred method of leading is walking slowly backward, facing the animal and holding the lead strap in the left hand with the extra lead neatly but naturally gathered in one or both hands. At all other times, walk facing forward at a quicker pace. When given the signal to pull into line, move quickly to that position in the ring.

Lead at a comfortable pace with the animal's head held high enough for impressive style, attractive carriage, and graceful walk. Never allow a large gap to occur between your animal and the one ahead of you. Do not crowd the exhibitor ahead of you nor lead in front of an animal so it cannot be seen by the judge.

When posing and showing a dairy animal, stay on the animal's left side and stand faced at an angle to her in a position far enough away to see the stance of her feet and topline. Pose the animal with her feet squarely placed. The hind leg nearest the judge is to be posed slightly behind the other when showing heifers. For cows and springing heifers,

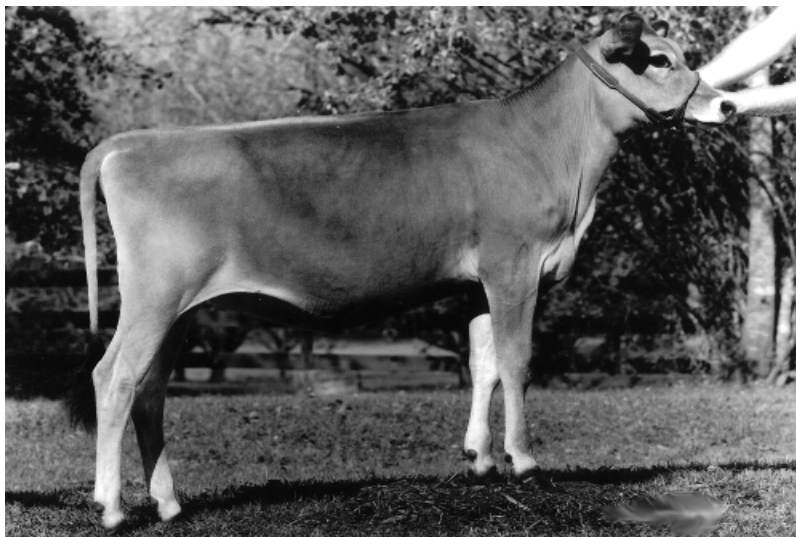
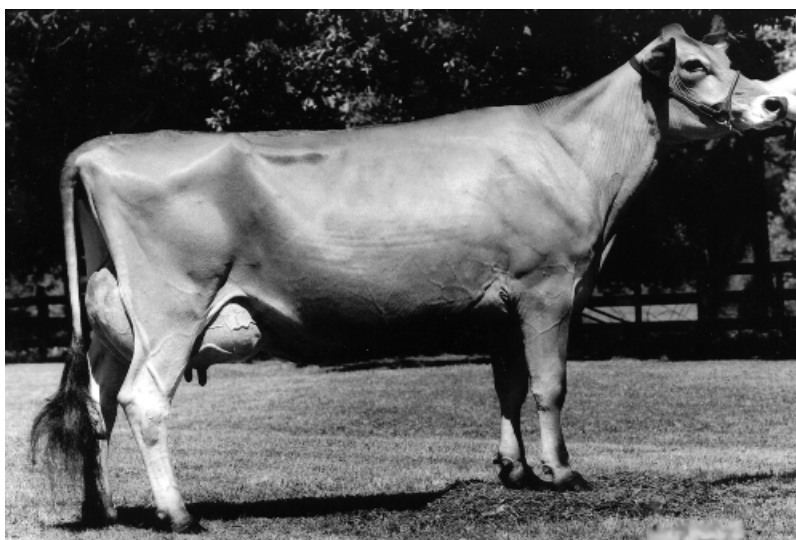
the hind leg nearest the judge should be far enough ahead of the opposite rear leg to allow the judge to see the fore and rear udder.

Train each animal so you (exhibitor) can move it quickly and easily into the correct pose. The position of the rear legs should be reversed when the judge walks around to view the animal from the other side. Do not overshadow an animal. When the judge is observing the animal, get the feet posed reasonably well, and let her stand. Do not delay the show in an attempt to pose the feet perfectly. Face the animal uphill, if possible, with her front feet on a slight incline.

Always move quickly into line when given the signal by a judge. Neither crowd the exhibitor next to you nor leave enough space for another animal when you lead into a side-by-side position. Animals may be backed out of a line when a judge requests that her placing be changed. Move the animal back by exerting pressure on the shoulder point with the thumb and finger of the right hand while pushing back with the halter. You may also lead the animal forward and around the end of the line or back through a break in the line. Do not lead the animal between the judge and an animal being observed by the judge. To move the animal ahead, pull gently on the lead strap. Do most of the showing with the halter lead strap, and avoid stepping on the animal's feet to move them.

Placing an animal's feet in the correct standing pose

requires much practice for the lead person and the animal. One way to learn proper feet placement is to study the photographs in breed publications.



## **Washing Your Animals**

After your animals arrive at the show site, wash them thoroughly. Liquid detergents for kitchen or laundry use are suitable for washing. Use a stiff brush, and work loose all of the dirt next to the hide.

When washing around the head, hold the ears closed to prevent water from getting in. If water gets in an ear, it may cause the ear to droop for several days. Wipe the ears clean with a cloth dampened with rubbing alcohol to remove the ear wax and dirt.

Don't forget to wash between the rear legs and udder, an area easily missed. Thoroughly wash the switch; you can remove tangles by using hair conditioner after washing.

Your animals may have to be spot washed just before the show. Be careful to allow enough time for the animal to dry completely before show time.

## **Other Showmanship Hints**

Showmanship is one area in which youth may excel, regardless of the correctness of the conformation of the calf or cow. Placing in showmanship competition is based strictly on the appearance of the exhibitor and how well the animal is shown in the ring. This is why so much emphasis is placed on these classes in Mississippi shows. Anyone who has the money can buy an animal of superior conformation; but to win in showmanship, an exhibitor **must**

work hard to train an animal and to learn proper showmanship techniques.

- It is generally agreed that white shirt and pants are the preferred dress for showmanship contests. Everything else being equal, the person dressed in all white is placed ahead of those who are not.
- It is important the exhibitor learn to watch the animal and the judge at all times. Do not be distracted by persons and things outside the ring. Keep your animal under complete control at all times.
- Quickly recognize the conformation faults of the animal you are leading, and show to overcome them. You may be asked to exchange with another exhibitor and show a different animal.
- A rolled leather halter is recommended; color is optional but should complement the breed of animal. The halter should fit properly and be placed correctly on the animal. The noseband should fit across the bridge of the nose midway between the eyes and the muzzle. A leather halter with leather or chain lead is preferred.

Frequently, a judge will ask questions about the exhibitor's animal to find out just how much work the exhibitor has done and how much he or she knows. Questions could include those about feeding practices, age of the animal, the animal's name, sire, and dam, and production, if the show animal is in milk.

If you are showing milking cows, it is important to have the

right amount of milk in the udder to best show its conformation. This is often called **bagging**. Cows producing a normal flow of milk should be milked about 12 hours in advance of showing. Try to determine when each cow class will be shown, and milk accordingly. You may wish to allow more time for cows that are in the latter part of their lactations. Do not overbag your cows, since it may cause the teats to strut, draw attention to a weak fore udder attachment, or cause your cow to be nervous and hard to handle.

### **PDCA Fitting and Showing Scorecard**

The Purebred Dairy Cattle Association scorecard for fitting and showing of dairy animals will help you place emphasis on certain areas of showmanship.

#### **Appearance of Animal - 30 points**

Cleanliness - 10 points

Grooming - 10 points

Clipping - 5 points

Condition and Thriftiness - 5 points

#### **Appearance of Exhibitor - 10 points**

#### **Showing Animal in the Ring - 60 points**

Leading - 25 points

Posing the Animal - 15 points

Show Animals to their Best Advantage - 10 points

Poise, Alertness, and Attitude - 10 points

## Checklist before the Show

Plans and details are important if you have success at the show. The following list provides guidelines for preparing for a show.

- Be sure you are familiar with the feeding and management arrangements at the show.
- Be sure you arrive on time.
- Make sure you have the registration certificate on each animal you plan to show.
- Be sure health requirements are met.
- DHI Production records are needed if you are showing cows, especially if they are entering the production contest.
- Bring needed items, for example, brushes, forks, brooms, and cleaning equipment.
- Have a tie-halter with a snap and double-tie rope for each animal.
- Have a show halter ready for show day.
- Have a uniform ready for show day; white is preferred.
- Be sure you know the arrangements for transporting your animal to the show.

The exhibitor who pays attention to the many details about showing is usually the most successful one. **Showing is hard work, but the rewards are numerous.** Showing a dairy animal provides exciting opportunities for the whole family. The companionship and interests shared with your

"showing" colleagues are positive influences for continued personal growth.

Information for this publication adapted in part from the **Dairy Showtime** series of letters and the Purebred Dairy Cattle Association (PDCA) Fitting and Showing Scorecard.

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## **Publication 1759**

Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with **U.S. Department of Agriculture**. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. Ronald A. Brown, Director