

# Protecting Your Livestock From Disease at the Fairs

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As the summer months roll by, the county Fairs and Field Days are bustling with activity across the state. One of the main attractions to these quaint local events are the livestock barns and petting zoos filled with cattle, horses, rabbits, chickens, pigs and more. The Livestock exhibitors and 4-H members are the back-bone to most of our fairs and field days. Our farms across the state play a big role by leasing their animals to 4-H members who do not live on farms. What better way to connect our local communities to our local agriculture? However, this does increase the chances of bringing contagious animal diseases back to the home farm from the fair.

A lot of farms probably have experienced at one point or another in their herd some scouring, fever, mastitis, or going off-feed after returning animals from a fair. And probably most dairy farms have had a case of ring-worm spread through the herd. Fairs, Field Days, and Livestock events have some control over this by making sure all animals have their health records in order, a rabies vaccination, and a physical inspection by a veterinarian prior to entry of the fairgrounds. It is also important to keep in mind that there will always be some level of pathogens present in the environment, but we can minimize the risk of spread.

To help control and minimize the risk of the spread of disease, it is important to understand the different routes of disease transmission in animals. They are the following: 1. Aerosol – Droplets are passed through the air from one animal to another; 2. Direct contact – A susceptible animal becomes exposed when the disease agent directly touches open wounds, mucous membranes, or the skin through blood, saliva, nose to nose contact, rubbing, or biting; 3. Reproductive – A subtype of direct contact that includes diseases spread through mating or to the fetus during pregnancy; 4. Fomite – An inanimate object carrying a disease agent from one susceptible animal to another; 5. Traffic – A subtype of fomite transmission in which a vehicle, trailer, or human spreads organic mate-

rial to another location; 6. Oral – Consuming disease causing agents in contaminated feed, water or licking/chewing on contaminated environmental objects; 7. Vector-borne – An insect acquires a disease agent from one animal and transmits it to another; 8. Zoonotic – Diseases transmitted from animals to humans; and environmental contamination must always be taken into consideration.

So as a livestock exhibitor what are some things that you can do to protect your animals, other animals at the fair, and the home farm that your animals will be returning to?

Here is a list of ideas:

## Do not share equipment

Equipment serves as a “fomite” and can carry diseases. Examples of your equipment may include; halters, water buckets, grain buckets, brushes, curry combs, clippers, wheel barrows, pitch forks, shovels, blankets, scissors, milking machines, etc. Understanding that many 4-H clubs share equipment within the club, an awareness of this risk can help minimize the spread of disease (example; cleaning equipment before and after use).

## Trucking and transportation

This is a tough one since many 4-H cattle are picked up by one truck and trailer and co-mingled on route to the fair. To minimize risk, tie animals up in the trailer to reduce direct contact. Have animals ready to be picked up at the front door so everyone doesn't walk through the barn, calving area, or feed alley to get to them. Park the trailer in a place that is dry and clean if possible. You may even want to spray off the tires with a water hose before stopping at the next farm. As the cattle hauler, it would be a good practice to give your trailer a thorough cleaning inside and out between events. This would make everyone feel more at ease (exhibitors, parents, and farmers).



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### Do not share common watering tubs or feed

Most livestock events have watering tubs. Water and feed can transmit diseases “orally.” You may want to consider having your own watering buckets that you fill up directly from the water spout. Some facilities are equipped with individual water bowls. Wash them out before use. The same goes for feed. Bring enough of your own so you don’t need to share.

### Have your animal checked out and visually inspected by a Vet BEFORE going to the Fair

You can have this done the same time the vet comes to the farm to give the rabies vaccinations, or doing other routine herd health checks at the farm. This will reduce costs since they are not making a special trip.

### Minimize contact between exhibitors

Have some space between your exhibit and the neighbor’s exhibit to reduce “direct” contact from animal to animal.

### Keep exhibit space clean, DRY, and comfortable

Make sure your exhibit area is well ventilated. Disease can spread this way by the “aerosol” route of transmission if your area is poorly ventilated. Talk to the livestock superintendent if you run into problems. But it would be best to be pro-active and bring a couple of extra fans since we can never predict what mother nature is really going to do! And as with any livestock facility...keep things clean, dry, and comfortable.

### Finally, be a team player and a positive representative of agriculture at your event

As an exhibitor at your event, be a role-model for other exhibitors and set a good example. Use common sense and keep manure cleaned out of alley ways and other areas of travel around the grounds (even if it was not your animal that made the mess). Keep your wheel barrows cleaned out often. Wash thoroughly any mess your animal might make at the milking parlor or at the wash rack, or anywhere else. Keep your exhibit area neat and tidy with equipment put away and organized, feed

neatly stored and out of the way, and your aisle swept up. Keep your animals’ coat free from manure at all times. Keep yourself neat and tidy as well with clean clothes and personal hygiene kept up. You can also serve as a fomite and transmit disease. It is helpful to bring a pair of rubber barn boots with you so that you can easily clean them off after making a trip to the parlor, wash rack, or wherever. Also, make sure you know how to tie a slip-knot so your animals aren’t wandering all over the barns in the middle of the night (I think we have all been there!).

### What to do when returning animals to the home farm

Some ways to reduce the spread of disease when returning animals to the home farm can include washing/hosing off animals’ feet before entering the barn, or separating show animals from the regular herd for a week or two to minimize risk (realizing this isn’t always practical). Most importantly, if you do not live on the farm, talk to the farmer that is leasing his or her animals to you. Communicate with them the actions and precautions that you have taken to help protect their herd from disease. They will consider you responsible and be much more eager to let you lease some more animals next year!

We can each play an important role at our fair or field day (exhibitor, 4-H member or leader, parent, volunteer, fair staff, etc.) in protecting our animals from disease, and at the same time we will be portraying a healthy and positive image of our local agriculture. None of us would eat without it!

August 2007