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Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service • Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

Beef Showmanship

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An exciting part of your 4-H Beef Project comes when you enter the show ring. All of your work and effort will be on display, so make the most of this opportunity. Showmanship skill is something that is developed and will take hours of practice. You will want to show your calf to its best advantage in order to bring out its strong points and minimize its faults. Experience and practice help you accomplish this goal.

Some points which should be considered in good showmanship are outlined below. These factors are not listed in any particular order of importance.

Be Ready and On Time

Be sure to know the show schedule so that you will be ready when the class is called. A late arrival in the show ring may cause some confusion, and may even distract the judge. It is wise to confirm that your calf has been entered in the correct class. Animals entered in the wrong class cause confusion and slow down the show. If the show requires that each exhibitor have an entry card before entering the ring, always make sure that you have the card, and any other required record or identification. Observe the judging of a few classes to familiarize yourself with ring procedures.

Entering the Show Ring

The first thing to do upon entering the show ring is to look for the ring official who is lining up your class. The ring official is there to help organize the class so that the judge can concentrate on judging without distractions. Be alert at all times, and carry out the instructions of the judge and ring officials closely.

Leading Your Calf in the Show Ring

Your exhibit should already be trained to lead and to stand correctly. At the walk, lead your calf from its left side

and keep the lead strip in your right hand about 14 to 18 inches from the calf's head. It is best to make about two or three loops if the lead strap is exceptionally long. This will prevent your calf from stepping on the strap. You may also cut the strap to a length of 2.5 to 3 feet and use it as shown in the figures. Never lead a beef calf with your left hand. The left hand is used to carry the show stick while walking your calf. Observe where you are going and occasionally look back to see if your calf is walking in a straight path. Walk at a moderate pace, and straight ahead with the calf's head even at your side. During the lead, the calf's head should be held just high enough to present an impressive style, attractive carriage, and graceful walk. Be aware of the animal in front of you, and do not get too close at the walk or when setting up for a side view. Be observant for signals and instructions from the judge, and the ring official. When leading your calf in a circle, move in a clockwise direction. This will put your animal between you and the judge. One of the key points in showmanship is never to obstruct the judge's view.

Setting Up and Posing Your Calf

Set your calf up gently and carefully each time it is moved to a new position. When you pull your calf into the line-up (side by side), always allow about three to four feet of space between your calf and the calf next to you (Figure 1). Do not crowd (Figure 2). This same distance should be maintained when lining up head to tail. Proper distancing allows for a better view and aids the judge in viewing and handling your calf. Before setting your calf up, transfer the lead strap to your left hand and the show stick to your right hand. It will take considerable practice to develop smooth and coordinated techniques in stopping your calf at the desired point, transferring the lead strap and show stick, and in turning and facing toward the rear of the calf. Set your calf up on a level area. If possible, pick a spot where its front feet will be slightly higher than its rear feet. Never place the front feet in a low area or the rear feet on higher ground. This causes your calf to appear low-fronted. When posing and showing your calf, stand on the calf's left side and face it at an angle. Stand far enough away from your calf so that you can see the stance of feet and the topline (Figure 3). The calf's head should be slightly elevated, its

back should be straight and it should be standing squarely on all four legs. Use your show stick, if necessary, to position the feet. A gentle stroke with the stick along the belly will help to keep the calf's back straight. Also, do not pose your calf in a twisted position. When the judge walks in front of your calf, make sure a good front view is possible by stepping out and away from your calf about a foot or two (Figure 4). Do not block the judge from seeing the calf's front end. Always pose your calf according to instructions. If the class is lined up head-to-tail, be sure that the judge gets a full side view, not a $\frac{3}{4}$ view. If the calves are lined up for a rear view (side

by side), make sure that your calf's rear end is even with the calves on either side since this helps the judge in making comparisons. (Figure 5).

Pulling Out of the Line-up

When pulling out of a line-up, always pull your calf forward out of the line-up before turning it around. After turning around, then lead your calf back through the line-up (where your calf previously stood), and proceed to the new position that the judge has instructed (Figure 6). If space permits it is permissible to lead forward and go around the line-up (on either end), and approach your new position from the rear. It is not good sportsmanship to turn your calf around in the



Figure 1. Proper distance between animals in line up.

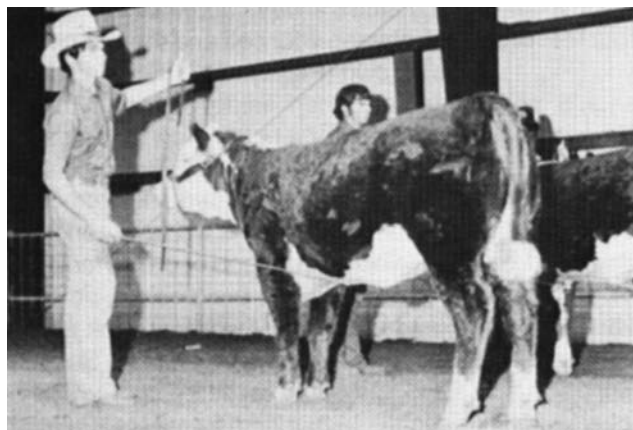


Figure 3. Proper stance for showman.



Figure 2. Animals too close in line up.



Figure 4. Presenting the animal for a front view.

middle of the line-up since your calf will bump the calves on either side of you (Figure 7). This will mess up the grooming efforts of other exhibitors and also yours.

Handling Nervous Calves

When the judge handles your calf, be sure you have a firm grasp of the halter strap. Calves that are nervous might jump and pull the lead strap out of your hand. It is good to tell the judge if your animal kicks or does not like to be touched. If the calf becomes restless, do not fight it. Work gently and to the best of your ability to get it to move and stand well. An exhibitor losing his temper with a restless calf will only make things worse, and he/she will go away from the show ring with a terrible feeling of frustration.



Figure 5. Proper placement of animals for a rear view.



Figure 6. Correct method of moving to a new position.

Be Natural

When showing, do not shake the lead strap and chain unnecessarily; do not try to stare the judge down; do not make a large amount of body motion; do not be a “grandstander.” Be natural; overshadowing and too much movement are objectionable. Relax and be calm. Your calf will share your confidence.

Be Alert

Always be aware of the judge’s location; however, do not concentrate on the judge so much that you forget about your animal and the animals around you. Your first obligation is to your calf, so keep checking to see that it is standing correctly and that it is in the proper position. Be ready to move if the judge signals you. Be prepared to answer any questions the judge may ask you about your calf, such as age or weight gain.

Appearance of Your Calf

The animal should be clean and well-groomed. The hair should be clipped in those areas as acceptable or recognized for the breed and sex. The hair on the body should be trained in an upward position. A good grooming job exemplifies pride of ownership by the exhibitor. The many hours spent brushing and training the hair well in advance of the show will be evident in the show ring. Your district 4-H educator has a slide-tape set that shows some methods of grooming beef animals for show.



Figure 7. Incorrect method of moving to a new position.

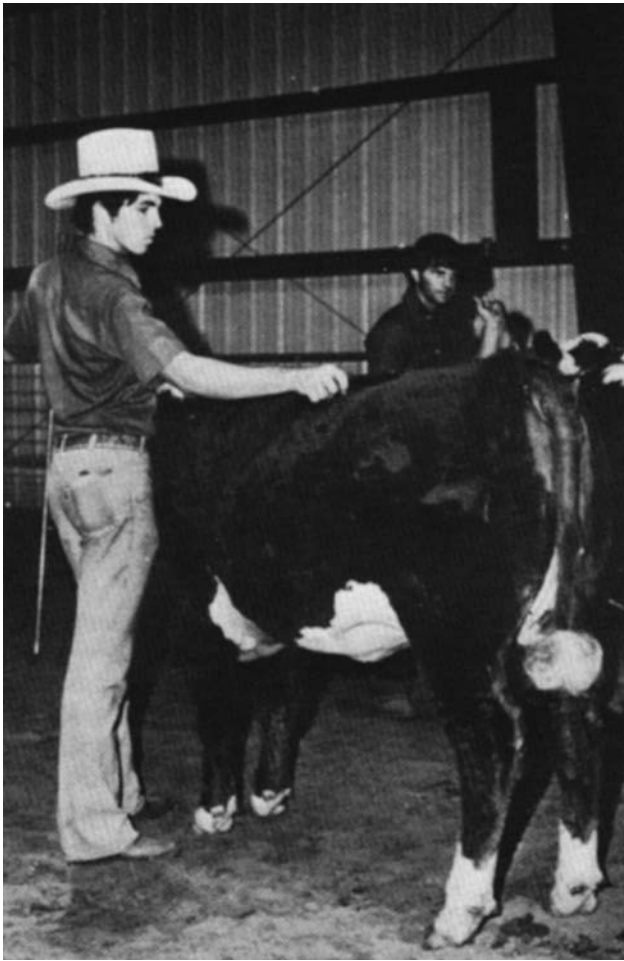


Figure 8. Using the comb to touch up the haircoat.

Show Ring Equipment

Necessary equipment for the show ring consists of a leather halter, a show stick, and a grooming device such as a comb or brush. The halter must be fitted properly on the calf's head to avoid slipping off. A show stick is a must because it is used to place the calf's feet correctly and to straighten up the back if necessary. A comb or brush is needed for touch-ups of the calf's haircoat after the judge handles the animal or after an accidental bump from another animal (Figure 8). A Scotch comb or dressing comb will fit into your back pocket comfortably.

Appearance of Yourself as an Exhibitor

You should be neat and clean just as the calf should be well-groomed. Remember, the audience looks at you too. Fancy clothes are not necessary, but neatness and cleanliness are important. Really, clothes that are too fancy may not be the best. It is recommended that you wear an appropriate item of clothing that will associate you with your respective youth organization. Check the show regulations concerning dress code and always comply with the requirements.

Be Courteous

Always be courteous to show officials, the judge, and the other exhibitors. A smile once in a while does not hurt anyone. Good sportsmanship is an important part of showmanship. Show your appreciation for the sponsorship of the show by being a good representative of your club, school, county, and family. Always try to do better next time and profit from your mistakes as you gain experience. If you have learned your showmanship lessons well, you will win without bragging and lose without complaining.