

Effective Animal Displays

Animals naturally attract people to the exhibit area and promote discussion. These forums can help clarify misinformation and address concerns, so it is important to provide an accurate portrayal of modern animal agriculture to the public.

- **Make it real:** Display farm animals in their regular housing. Do not foster or generate misconceptions by using inappropriate settings. People see negative and/or inaccurate images of farming in the media all the time. The industry should be open about our practices and the rationale behind them. This is agriculture's chance to show how things are really done, but do not forget to include an explanation why. Misconceptions are often fostered in fact, so farmers have to take every opportunity to explain the rationale behind modern practices to help bridge the gap between farm and fork.
- **All shapes and sizes:** People are more interested in different stages of growth of animals than breeds. Combine different breeds and sizes to maximize the value of the display. This is extremely important for explaining the lifecycle of a farm animal and how quickly they grow.
 - **Examples:**
 - A pen of Yorkshire weaners
 - A pen of Hampshire gilts
 - A Landrace sow with a crossbred litter in a farrowing unit
- **What is it?** Label everything, including the age and breed of the animals. Do not assume that your audience will know a cow is a cow, and not a pony. Be as specific as you can without being confusing. Do not oversimplify by simply stating "COW" -- Is it a dairy cow or a beef cow, a boy or girl, young or old? Explain the role of the animal: meat or milk; and what it eats, production methods, and equipment. If you include specific terms, be sure to define them.
- **Farm animals are not pets or people:** Avoid giving human-like characteristics to your animals. This is critical when trying to explain issues such as separating calves from cows and at what age they reach market weight. Use pedigree names if appropriate. If the animal on display does not have a name, do not give it one; instead explain it has a number and what the number represents. Replace signs which say "Hello, my name is Suzy and I eat hay." with "This young female cow is a beef breed called 'Charolais', due to have a calf in 2 months."



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The following is a list of suggestions for animal presentations. Although the animals are there for public education, their wellbeing should not be jeopardized. Human and animal safety are top priorities. Your job is to minimize stress, injuries, and animal aggression.

- **People:** Keep in mind who your visitors will be. Assume they have little or no experience with farm animals. People will walk up directly behind animals or put their fingers in pens and cages to pet or feed them. Even the quietest animal can only tolerate this for so long before they start to bite, kick, or peck in defence. Prepare for this by planning where you want people to walk and to have access to the animals. Use ropes, barriers, and double penning to control access to the animals.
- **Access to the animals:** Signs and volunteers should discourage visitors from feeding, petting, or picking up the animals. Young animals, like piglets and chicks, seem to be the most inviting.
 - **Examples:**
 - “In the interest of animal health and safety, please do not feed the animals.”
 - “Be careful ~ this animal may bite”.
- **Quiet animals:** Use animals that are accustomed to human interaction. Animals should be kept as calm and unstressed as possible. Show animals and 4-H projects are often used in these exhibits. Keep in mind these animals should be representative of what you would see on a working farm.
- **Delivery:** Animals should arrive at the location ahead of the event's opening. This will allow the animals time to acclimatize to new surroundings.
- **Animal health:** A sick animal reflects badly on the exhibit, the home farm, and on agriculture in general. If any animals begin to show signs of illness or stress, they should be removed immediately and/or returned home for care. Have a plan in place in case an animal gets sick or dies, including a pen or cage out of public view, an emergency list of phone numbers with a veterinarian and a transporter who could come on short notice. You should always have someone “on-duty” around animals. It does not take long for something to go wrong and someone should be nearby to deal with any problems that could arise.
- **Code of Practice:** Pen size, stocking density, and food and water requirements should meet the guidelines set out in the Recommended Code of Practice for each animal. There are now Recommended Codes of Practice for the Care and Handling of the following animals: poultry, dairy, beef, horses, sheep, pigs, veal, deer, mink, and fox. These do not necessarily need to be on hand, but should be used as a reference. Copies of the Recommended Code of Practice can be accessed online at www.nfacc.ca.



- **Pens:** Keep animals in appropriate pens. Use strong penning with no sharp edges that will keep animals in and humans out. Separate different types of animals and provide plenty of space. The Ole' McDonald's farm atmosphere is created if a number of different animals are close to each other or all in the same pen which does not reflect a modern farm. There is a reason animals are segregated and the public should be aware of them.
 - **Feed and Water:** Always have a constant supply of water available whenever possible. If pails are used, they should be secured to avoid spillage. Visitor complaints about animals on display are most frequently about the animals having no feed or water. Set up displays of what each animal eats, how often, and in what quantity each day.
 - **Bedding:** Use similar bedding methods to those on the farm. If conditions require no bedding, explain why. Keep pens clean and dry by removing urine soaked bedding and manure frequently each day.



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