

# Petting Zoo Guidelines

Farm animals or pets? It's very important to convey the message that farm animals should not be considered pets. It's often very difficult for people who are not from farm backgrounds to understand how livestock farmers can care for farm animals and then ultimately use them for food. Many visitors will relate to pets, and will compare the farm animals on display to pets or even people. If you take a minute to think of normal production practices such as separating dairy calves from cows, castration, weaning and marketing ages, and tail docking you will see how it might disturb someone who thinks of the animal in human or pet terms. "How would you like to live like that?" and "You would be charged with cruelty if you kept your dog like that" are two examples that illustrate those attitudes.

This leaves you with a dilemma of educating the public about agriculture and entertaining them at the same time. A good compromise is to set up a separate area with animals that are chosen for their gentle temperament.

- Goats and sheep work well. Geese, rabbits, and chickens are generally not suitable.
- Do not allow visitors in with the animals if an attendant is not available. Only allow a limited number of visitors in with supervision. Insurance, health, and safety issues all need to be weighed against the benefits of allowing people in with the animals.
- **The ideal set up is a fenced in area where people can reach in to pet the animals that want the attention. Put a 'barn' or a straw wall up in the middle where the animals can get away from the crowds.**
- The maximum length of time an animal should be on display is 8 hours or less, depending on factors such as crowds and temperatures. Any animals showing signs of stress or illness should be removed immediately.
- Rotate animals out of the area on a regular basis.
- Pens and animals should be kept very clean.
- Do not allow people to pick up the animals.
- Make sure a regular feeding program is in place, above and beyond the 'kids feeding pellets in a cone' idea. **This is critical to ensure that larger animals that aren't as 'cute' get enough feed.**

