

Preparing Your Market Project for Fair

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Preparing for a successful livestock 4-H project starts now. By setting goals at this time and continuing the learning process throughout your project, your experience will be more enjoyable and less stressful. Begin planning, studying and asking questions of other 4-H members, leaders and volunteers, and you will have a more rewarding and educational market animal experience. Follow these concepts to increase your personal success with your animal project.

1. Plan ahead in selecting and purchasing your project

Most exhibitors are probably searching for or have already raised or found their project animal. Consider concepts of animal evaluation to select your project, paying particular attention to breed and quality as a **market** animal. Muscle and overall confirmation is important, as well as ability to grow and gain in order to meet the weight and average daily gain requirements set by the Market Committee. Size at weigh-in and Fair is key, and proper selection is essential. Age, breed/genetics, confirmation, care and feeding are all involved in reaching your goal at Fair to meet your 4-H Market project requirements and being successful at the Fair.

2. Know your budget

Though we all would love to buy a top quality animal at a fancy sale, often this is not practical or possible. Making a budget with the cost of the animal, feed, care and an "emergency fund" is essential. This is where your record keeping comes in. Looking at the sale prices from previous fairs can help you determine if you will come out ahead financially with your project and help you determine how much you can spend on purchasing your project animal. You must meet a basic standard in quality and size/age for the animal you choose or your project will not be successful, but at the same time it may not be necessary to buy a very expensive animal that will make it difficult to break even and may even mean a loss financially. Feed costs can be the largest expense of raising a market animal, especially a steer. Quality and the correct type of feed is essential for success. Knowing the cost and the approximate quantity of feed needed is important. Other costs involved in care need to be considered, as well as the occasional emergency funds, such as treating injuries, health problems or parasites, that often come up.

3. General care

After many years of raising animals for Fair and being the Skamania County Fair veterinarian, I have seen many common problems with basic animal husbandry and care. Well cared for animals are healthier, happier and grow better. Keeping them clean, comfortable and parasite free is important. Knowing which vaccinations, and when and how to administer them, is vital. Parasite control, both internal and external, is essential for good growth and health of your animal. Lice, mange, flies and worms must be properly treated and controlled well before fair. All care should be done **early** and followed up at the proper intervals. Withdrawal periods for medications and treatments must be followed- this is essential for public health. **DO NOT BRING AN UNHEALTHY ANIMAL TO FAIR.** Remember the public is watching. Quality feed and the correct feed for your type of animal is very important. The amount fed and how it is introduced is critical. Slowly changing feed type, quantity and quality, will eliminate many health and growth problems. Sudden feed changes in amount or type can be deadly. Animals on

full feed are especially susceptible to health problems when changes are made. The Fair is stressful for your market animal. **DO NOT MAKE FEED CHANGES RIGHT BEFORE OR AT FAIR.** I used to put our animals on a less "rich" diet a few days before and at Fair to help with the stress of fair. For example, replacing some of the alfalfa hay with more grass hay, or adding some rolled oats to their high powered steer finishing feed, can be helpful. Do not add richer feed or hay at Fair. Also water changes are difficult for animals at fair, many won't drink the "city" water. Try to prepare by adding a flavored electrolyte (a small amount) to their water the week or two before fair and use the same water bucket you will use at fair. Some people carry in water from home but this is difficult.

4. Show preparation

Handling and training your animal, clipping, hair/wool care and hoof care are important many months to weeks before fair. Waiting till the last minute is not a good idea and may decrease your chance of success. Even if you have the best quality animal, if it has a poor coat with improper grooming, or if it is unruly or untrained, you may place lower in your class. Please prepare and work with your animal so that you know each other, it will be less stressful for everyone at fair, and you will have a more enjoyable and successful project.