



TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

Beef Cattle Showmanship

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This subject is one of the most important pieces in the beef cattle project because if you cannot “show off” your project on show day, it can have a big negative impact on your placing and potential monetary rewards in the auction due to that lower placing. Most experts say it can affect you by 2-3 places in the ring and at the major show level that can mean making or missing the sale, winning your class versus 3rd or 4th in class, or breed champion versus a placer. Do not ever let yourself get out shown or “beat on the stick” by another competitor that worked harder than you did. A good showman is confident in their abilities but not cocky, poised, not nervous under pressure, has a great attitude, shows great effort, and never, ever quits showing out in the ring.

At Home – It is important to note that showmanship starts at home and in the barn. You should be tying your calf’s head up at least every other day. You should be setting them up and walking them around in a ring every other day or at least once per week. You should be rinsing them off at minimum every other day. Not only does this help hair growth and skin quality, but it gives you constant and consistent contact with your calf. The more time you spend with your calf the more you and your calf become a team. When you leave the barn and head to the show ring, the trust you have gained makes showing that much easier. You HAVE to dedicate a lot of time and effort at home to working with your calf.

In the Ring – Showmanship in the ring is all about making your calf look its absolute best and at 12 o’ clock. The goal is to minimize a negative look by the judge. To elaborate, you must be fast when setting legs, holding the head correctly, leveling the topline, and anything else. Your mission is to never let the judge see your calf not showing its best look! You should know your calf’s strengths and weaknesses. We want to accentuate the strengths and try and hide the weaknesses. For example, if your calf is weak behind the shoulder, you have to make sure and not stretch him out and make that weakness glaring. If he has a bigger shoulder, we will try and offset those front feet to tuck that in ever so slightly. If he is narrower at the ground on his rear legs, we will try and make him set is feet wider. Again, these are simple fixes but they must be known prior to showing so we can try and make them look their best.

- Hold your calf’s head up at all times to make those calves necks look longer. This will help them look more attractive, they will appear to be more elevated in their chest floor and overall be more eye appealing. The walk in the ring is the first time the judge sees your animal so take advantage and have your calf look alert and eye catching.
- The **rear view** is the first planted view most judges see. Don’t worry about your calf’s front feet initially. Get those back feet set square and shoulder width apart. You do not want the feet too far apart and you do not want them close together. Too wide screams unnatural. Too close is showing the judge your calf does not exhibit much lower quarter and lacks muscle. Some folks like to offset those rear two feet just slightly and that’s good too, just

- make sure you get them set first and then worry about the front feet. If the judge is coming and looking at the front view of your animal first, then obviously this reverses your priority of which set of feet to correct first.
- The next component in most shows will then have you lead your calf around the ring. Be aware of your calf's natural walking speed. The shorter strided calves don't need to walk at a fast pace. The main goal is to look smooth and have the calf look smooth and comfortable. Pay attention to the calf's head carriage here too.
 - Now, on to the most important view, **the profile, or side view**. Most good showman will be able to walk their calf into this correct stance 9 out of 10 times. It takes work at home and lots of practice. The main goal is to keep the show side (opposite of the youth side) back leg set farther back than the exhibitor side. This "scissoring" look will help to create a more level topline, creates a better tail set, and lengthens the view of your calf. Again, we have to know the strengths and weaknesses of your calf to know how far the offset of feet is. Pay attention to your calf's topline here too to keep it level and pay attention to you calf's head carriage. The front feet can just a bit offset with the show side leg being slightly more forward than the exhibitor side front foot as this will help to extend body length and make the neck and top of the shoulder blend in smoother and higher. If you can get your calf to walk into this stance, a show stick may only be needed to slowly scratch the calf and keep them calm.

Show Stick. Speaking of that show stick, it should be used to set your calf's feet and to keep him calm and relaxed. Do not scratch him fast; just slow and steady to keep the calf's heart rate down and consistent. Also, we use that stick to help us level the topline. If a calf gets up in their topline or off in their hip, use the stick to relax their spine and correct the angle the judge is seeing. If they are weak in the top, use the stick under their belly to try and pick their top up a bit. Again, we are trying to correct the angle the judge is seeing and create symmetry.

Give yourself room to maneuver. Keep 5-6 feet between the calf in front of you when setting up head to tail. This extra space allows you room to maneuver if you need to pull out of line and circle back in correctly and re-set. When lining up for the rear view, allow 3-4 feet beside each calf for turnaround room if need be. Follow the ring steward's directions on where to set, but allow some extra space.

Show Positive Ring Awareness. Always be willing to help your fellow competitors in the ring. Tap their calf on the rear or twist a tail if they are having a hard time walking in front of you. Help any of our young ones in the ring if they struggling. Look focused and determined but not angry. Look approachable and pleasant. Keep your eye on the judge and follow directions. Show good sportsmanship if things go good or bad in the ring. Do not give up!

Dress. Young men and young ladies should be appropriately dressed to show. They should wear jeans or slacks, a nice button up shirt or Polo/pullover shirt (ladies can wear any nice blouse/shirt). I recommend tucking your shirt in and wearing a belt. Wear boots or comfortable working footwear but no tennis

shoes, flip-flops, or sandals. We are trying to prevent injury. Also, dress in a way that will NOT take away the attention from your calf. The judge should be seeing your calf, not any distractions.

Things to NOT do:

- Leave your shirt untucked
- Wear a cap in the ring
- Wear pants with holes all in them or distracting type clothing
- Wear tennis shoes
- Wear flip flops or sandals
- Wear t-shirts or shirts with inappropriate markings or sayings on them
- Showing excessive skin or inappropriate areas or inappropriate dress items

Summary. Remember, showmanship is about hard work, dedication, sportsmanship, humbleness in victory, dignity in defeat, preparation, respectfulness, and doing your homework on your project and species shown. With steers, study your carcass and meat science, fat ranges, carcass weights, quality and yield grades, and any other factors dealing with your market steer project. With heifers, study on gestation, estrous cycles, calving intervals, and any other production terminology. All of this knowledge can help you sound like a cattleman when talking to a judge when he/she is selecting their showmanship winner. If you seem like a cattle kid, have an approachable look and attitude, and make your animal look its absolute best; you will be adding several showmanship awards to your collection like buckles, plaques, banners, and money! Good luck and get to work!!