



Animal Care: Tips for youth communicating with the public

Lindsay Chichester, Extension Educator, University of Nevada, Reno and Karna Dam, Extension Educator, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Learning about Animal Care

Youth livestock exhibitors should be aware that the public will develop opinions about production agriculture based on what they see, hear, and perceive at livestock shows, fairs and exhibitions. With a smart phone it only takes seconds for someone to capture the interaction between you and your animal. Remember the practices that are used to prepare and show animals may be all the public ever sees as livestock production – so set a good example and don't let a moment of poor judgement go viral!

Youth livestock producers (you) are ethically, morally and legally responsible for animals in their care. Animals should be provided appropriate feed, water, comfort, and safety while ensuring the animals are not subjected to unnecessary fear, stress, or discomfort. You are ethically responsible for the well-being of the animals in your care and must not tolerate willful acts of animal neglect or abuse. Take pride in the fact that appropriate animal well-being and properly caring for animals is the right thing to do.

Animal well-being, animal care,
animal welfare, animal husbandry,

or animal rights – What's the difference?

Often we hear “animal care”, “animal well-being”, “animal welfare”, and “animal rights” used interchangeably. These phrases mean different things, and it is important to understand the differences.

- **Animal well-being animal welfare, and animal husbandry** are terms that mean the same thing; they acknowledge that humans may responsibly use animals for both human and animal benefit (i.e. livestock nutrition, forage and grain utilization, etc.). There is a responsibility to provide the best treatment possible to animals, to be mindful of ethical practices in consideration of food safety. People who believe in animal well-being, animal welfare, and/or animal husbandry agree that animals should be treated with respect, without exception.
- **Animal care** is what it says, providing care for an animal. Responsible livestock producers provide the best care and treatment for their animals, ensure they are receiving high quality feed, fresh

clean cool water and appropriate shelter, quick treatment if ill, and low-stress handling when necessary.

- **Animal husbandry** is a form of agricultural production where animals are raised for meat, fiber, milk, eggs, or other products. It includes daily care and management to ensure healthy, productive animals.
- **Animal rights** is a philosophy which believes many or most uses of animals for human benefit are NOT acceptable because animals have certain characteristics that make it wrong to use them for human purpose. Extreme animal rights advocates believe that animal lives are just as important as or more important than human lives.

The role Quality Assurance plays

While animal care focuses on the care you as a youth producer provides through your moral and ethical obligations as a caregiver, quality assurance plays a role too. Quality assurance provides consumers with protection and some piece of mind knowing that appropriate actions are being taken when raising a safe and wholesome product for consumption. The combination of animal care and quality assurance are an ideal and holistic approach to livestock production.

As a responsible youth livestock producer, excellent care should be provided for your animal(s) on a full-time basis. Through sound production practices, animals will flourish. Quality Assurance (QA) was developed to assure consumers that the products produced from animals that are consumed or produce a consumable product are wholesome, safe, and the animals which produced the product were cared for properly. While several species (beef, swine, dairy, and sheep) have existing adult quality assurance programs, there was a need for a youth program. The Youth for the Quality Care of Animals (YQCA) was developed in 2017 and has many of the same principles as adult QA programs. In

general, QA programs focus on good production practices which include:

1. Providing proper animal handling and care.
2. Identifying and documenting care of all animals to assist with traceability.
3. Establishing an efficient and effective animal health management plan.
4. Following appropriate feed processor procedures and feed tag recommendations, including withdrawal recommendations for medicated feeds.
5. Establishing appropriate vaccination and treatment protocols.
6. Developing a Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR).
7. Educating all employees and/or family members on proper treatment techniques.
8. Maintaining vaccination, medication, and treatment records.
9. Properly storing, labeling, and accounting for all animal health products and medicated feeds.
10. Using drug residue tests when appropriate.
11. Reviewing and updating your Quality Assurance program annually.

Animal producers trained in QA and ethics should understand their important role in:

1. Producing a wholesome, safe, and nutritious food product for the consumer.
2. Producing a high quality, visually appealing, and delicious product for consumers.
3. Understanding that as animal care takers, they have a responsibility to provide optimum care, safety, and comfort for animals at all times.

Tips for Telling Your Story

At a fair, show, or exhibition you may be interviewed by the media or approached by people who do not raise animals. It is important to be able to share your story with the general public.

The Center for Food Integrity's Engage Training (2015) provides strategies when communicating with the public:

1. **Values** – What do you have in common with this person? Find the common ground. This should be the first step. Once you have established you have commonalities, then move to the science.
2. **Science** - Share facts or research about the topic but be mindful that some of these facts will seem biased or flawed to people. Do not take it to heart.
3. **Economics** - Is there a benefit to the person? The community? The world? Do not lead with how much money you make or how much money you will get from your project animal.

It is also crucial to be as transparent as possible. Increasing transparency builds trust. The Center for Food Integrity's A Clear View of Transparency training (2015) provides seven tips you can use to build trust and transparency:

1. **Motivation** – Act in a manner that is ethical.
2. **Disclosure** – Share information publically.
3. **Stakeholder participation** – Engage those interested in your activities or impact.
4. **Relevance** – Share relevant information.
5. **Clarity** – Share information that is easily understood and obtained.
6. **Credibility** – Share positive and negative information so people can make a decision.
7. **Accuracy** – Share information that is truthful, objective, reliable and complete.

Your Personal Experience

With each animal you raise, you have a unique experience. Rarely will two people have the same story. As you communicate with the public, share your experience. Remember there are two main components, the animal care portion and the consumer protection portion.

Animal care:

- Did you raise this animal yourself?
- Did you select it from a group of other animals?
- What did it eat?
- What does its shelter look like?
- How much time do you spend with it?

Consumer protection:

- Did it get sick? If so, did you provide antibiotics?
- Why withdrawal dates are followed?

As a producer these are all questions you should be able to answer about your animals. Being transparent and communicating with the public can be nerve wracking, but sharing with them that you maintain records, complete Quality Assurance training, and provide the best care to your animal goes a long way in increasing their confidence that you are raising a safe and wholesome food product that they would feel comfortable eating and feeding to their family.

Sources:

A Clear View of Transparency (2015). Training presented by The Center for Food Integrity.

Engage. (2015). Training presented by The Center for Food Integrity.

The University of Nevada, Reno is committed to providing a place of work and learning free of discrimination on the basis of a person's age, disability, whether actual or perceived by others (including service-connected disabilities), gender (including pregnancy related conditions), military status or military obligations, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, genetic information, national origin, race, or religion. Where discrimination is found to have occurred, the University will act to stop the discrimination, to prevent its recurrence, to remedy its effects, and to discipline those responsible.