

Keeping Your Cattle Healthy at the Fair

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The Mississippi State Fair is just around the corner! Livestock show season can be a very exciting and busy time for exhibitors and their families. For many families, preparation and travel to shows and exhibitions require considerable time and commitment. Following good health management practices before, during, and after the exhibition will help protect these investments by keeping your cattle healthy and in good condition. Responsible exhibitors must have an understanding of common diseases of concern in exhibition animals, and know how to recognize signs of illness in their animals.

Disease Recognition:

Exhibitors should be able to recognize common signs of illness in their cattle and contact a food animal veterinarian when any of the following signs are observed:

- Decrease or lack of eating or drinking
- Sudden decreased milk production in lactating animals
- Change in amount or consistency of manure (constipation, straining, diarrhea, change in color)
- Abnormal discharge from eyes, nose or mouth
- Lameness or unwillingness to stand
- Fever (observed as shaking or shivering)
- Unusual patterns of hair loss or skin rashes

Temperatures in livestock may be slightly increased when they are stressed, crowded or transported. The average rectal temperature for cattle is 101.3 °F with a range of 98.0 – 102.8 °F.

Certain symptoms can be indicative of a more serious ailment or foreign animal disease and should be immediately reported to your veterinarian or the on-site veterinary official. These symptoms include:

- Weakness or incoordination, stumbling, circling
- Blisters on the mouth, muzzle, feet or teats

Cattle with any signs of infectious disease, including warts, active ringworm lesions, pinkeye, footrot, or draining abscesses should not be exhibited or allowed on show premises. When your show animal requires treatment, make sure your veterinarian is aware the animal is to be shown so that banned substances are not given, your treatment records can be updated, and all withdrawal times can be followed.

Disease Prevention:

A fair or exhibition venue brings many animals and people together in a close environment, increasing the potential for disease transmission. Having a good overall herd health program, including biosecurity measures, proper vaccination and parasite (internal and external) control protocols, and good nutrition will help ensure the health of the herd and help prevent disease transmission. There are several diseases affecting multiple species or single species of animals that are of particular concern in exhibition settings. Some of these diseases are zoonotic, meaning they can be transmissible from animals to humans.

General recommendations to follow PRIOR to an exhibition:

- Proper nutrition is the cornerstone of sound animal health management and essential for optimal growth and immunity. Avoiding sudden diet changes in the weeks preceding and during the exhibition will help prevent diarrhea, acidosis, bloat, and founder.
- Follow your veterinarian's recommendations and make sure vaccinations (including necessary boosters) are given at least 2 weeks prior to the show. Animals should be properly treated for internal and external parasites using recommended deworming and fly control products.
- Clean and disinfect all equipment such as buckets, shovels, manure rakes and forks, wheelbarrows, ropes, halters, combs and brushes, clippers, etc. prior to leaving home.
- Make sure health certificates or certificates of veterinary inspection (CVI) are current and include proper animal identification, health statements and consignee (destination) information. In Mississippi, health certificates for show animals are valid for 60 days (usually only 30 days for animals not on a show circuit). Always check with your veterinarian for additional information and clarification about specific requirements.
- If traveling across state lines, check the import requirements of the state of destination.
- Several days prior to departure, carefully inspect your livestock trailer to be sure it is in good operating condition (tires, brakes, lights, flooring, safety chains, etc.). Be sure the trailer has adequate ventilation and secure, slip-resistant flooring and that it is thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before and after each use.
- If transporting with other animals, arrange for a drop-off point and prevent haulers with multiple animals from multiple farms from entering your premises. Know the health and vaccination status of animals that are hauled with yours and avoid contact with all visibly ill animals.
- Make arrangements to bring adequate amounts of feed and forages your animals are accustomed to consuming to accommodate proper feeding throughout the time they are at the exhibition.
- Leave companion animals such as dogs and pets at home. In addition to serving as vectors for pathogens, other animals can become stressed themselves and be more susceptible to disease.

General recommendations to follow DURING an exhibition:

- Limit commingling of your cattle with others as much as possible during transportation and loading/unloading.
 - Keep copies of health certificates, vaccinations records and test results on hand and readily available if needed.
 - Keep older animals separate from younger animals as much as possible.
 - Provide plenty of fresh water and feed. Avoid changing sources and types of feed and water during the exhibition. Do not allow manure to contaminate your animals' feed, water, forages, or feeding equipment.
 - Don't share equipment with other exhibitors unless it has been cleaned and disinfected between uses.
 - Avoid contacting other people's animals and entering their pens. If contact is unavoidable, be sure to wash your hands and shoes frequently.
 - Keep unused feed and forages covered to reduce risk of contamination.
- Minimize stress by keeping cattle cool, clean, and comfortable. Use recommended fly control products as appropriate.

- Properly dispose of used bedding and uneaten, stale feed.
- Observe animals closely several times a day for illness and immediately report any suspicious symptoms to animal health officials.
- Closely monitor lactating dairy animals throughout the exhibition to be sure they are comfortable with easy access to fresh, clean feed and water. Follow all recommended milking procedures and maintain clean bedding while at the show to help ensure good udder health and high milk quality.
- If your animals show any signs of illness, contact a veterinary official as soon as possible. To prevent disease spread, limit contact with other animals as much as possible until the animal can be examined by the veterinarian.
- If you, your family members, or other persons in your group become ill or develop unusual skin rashes during the exhibition, avoid contact with animals and promptly seek medical attention.

General recommendations to follow AFTER an exhibition:

- Properly dispose of leftover bedding, feed and forages at the show facility or dispose of at an appropriate off-farm site before returning home.
- All equipment returning to the farm should be cleaned and disinfected prior to leaving the show facilities.
- Keep fair animals isolated from other animals on your farm for a minimum of 14 days, preferably 30 days.
- Feed, water and tend to animals in isolation last to avoid any possible cross-contamination to other animals.
- Carefully monitor animals in isolation for signs of illness.

Exhibiting cattle can be an enjoyable and educational experience. By following some simple recommendations, you can keep your livestock healthy and protect other animals and people from potentially harmful disease.