

ANIMAL WELFARE VS. ANIMAL RIGHTS

The *Animal Rights* philosophy states that animals have the same legal and ethical rights as humans. Individuals who believe in animal rights want complete elimination of all uses of animals for food, clothing, leisure, or research.

Believers in *Animal Welfare* feel that it is important to provide animals with proper care. Specifically, animals should be raised under humane conditions and practices. Farmers are strong supporters of this concept.

PROPER CARE OF ANIMALS

Proper care is important for the animals and it helps to present a good image to the fairgoer — who in many cases may be an urban dweller who has not other contact with the farm or farm animals. Good husbandry must be practiced at all times. Good manners and a courteous disposition go a long way in presenting a favorable impression to fairgoers. Remember that many of these people are one or more generations removed from the farm and their questions may sound off the wall. But always be polite in answering them.

1. Prepare the animals for the show by proper training, fitting and grooming. Keep the needs of the animals a number one priority.
2. Provide safe, clean transportation for the animals. Use care when loading and unloading the animals to minimize stress.
3. Tie or house the animals with enough space to prevent crowding, fighting, or strangulation.
4. Keep fresh bedding around the animals and remove soiled bedding regularly.
5. Provide fresh, clean water and the right amount of feed to meet the animal's needs.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Planning is essential. Think about how you will react to questions *before* you are confronted. Always avoid getting angry. An angry response is almost guaranteed to make you look foolish — that is exactly what the animal rights folks want. It is better to say nothing at all.

If you don't feel knowledgeable about a topic, it is ok to refer to another person. In other cases, the issue should not be discussed at all. For example, agricultural producers do not discuss the *rights* of animals. It can be simply be stated that you will discuss animal *care* — but not animal *rights*. Explain that you are trained to provide the best possible care for animals and that you aren't going into a philosophical discussion on animal rights.

At other times, you can simply talk best from your own experience. If you are asked a question that can be related to your farming experience, you can speak with authority. No one is more knowledgeable about your project than you are.

General Guidelines for answering questions:

1. Have a positive attitude. It is your chance to impress the public.
2. Listen carefully to the question, pause to think before you respond.
3. Develop 20-second responses (or so-called block answers) to questions. Make a statement, add support with facts, then summarize the original statement. Do not ramble after you have made your point.
4. Respond only in the positive. Avoid “no-win” attacks on animal rightists’ positions.
5. Never make up an answer. If you don’t know the answer, say so, and offer to find out. Then, get back to the reporter promptly.
6. Avoid technical jargon. Use “neutering” instead of “castrating”, for example. Speak in terms that the public will understand.
7. Don’t feel obligated to accept unfamiliar facts and figures. If they are sprung on you just say “I’m sorry I’m not familiar with those figures,” and proceed with what do you do know.
8. If you are asked several questions at once, you might say, “You’ve just asked me several questions. Let me respond to your points one at a time ...” Then pick a question you feel comfortable with.
9. Remember everything is “on the record”. If you don’t want a statement quoted, don’t make it.
10. Don’t feel obligated to respond to hypothetical questions. These usually begin with “What if ...”

HANDLING A DISRUPTIVE SITUATION

Today’s animal rights advocates routinely set up exhibits at fairs. If they are simply distributing information, the best tactic is to ignore them and concentrate on getting out your own information. An attractive, action-oriented exhibit staffed by friendly people will build good will — the Ag Center.

In some cases, however, direct action is the tactic used by the animal rights advocates, because such action automatically attracts free publicity. The stated purpose of “staged encounters” is to raise consciousness of the issues, promote consumer boycotts of animal products, and increase support for stringent animal welfare laws. Some of these groups take pride in harassment, serious vandalism, theft, and other actions against farms. Their purpose is often to encourage farmers to quit and follow other pursuits.

In a volatile climate created by a disturbance, it is essential that everyone involved with the event manage the incident with calm and consistency.