

Displays & Signs... with a Mission!

It's your job to get a message out to your audience even if they just walk by your display area. Some people will stop to talk, many others will not. An interesting display area should attract attention and make people want to stop and find out more!

Displays work best when you:

- Use colourful signs with clearly labelled words.
- Use big, bold signs and display items for maximum impact.
- Clearly state your message on the sign itself (e.g. caring for pigs is an important job). Find ways to reinforce your message on the display and throughout your presentation.
- Refer to the signs during your presentation. If it is for a young group, then design ways for your sign to become a manipulative so that the children can become involved during your presentation. Individual pieces could be attached with velcro for easy movement.
- Have the kids read what the sign says in unison, in partners, individually or as a group. Expand the message of the sign to other areas.
- Include something that the children can touch, smell, see or taste. A multi-sensory experience lasts longer and is more enjoyable for all learning styles.
- Feature pigs!

Effective Animal Displays

A sow and her piglets in a farrowing unit is a huge attraction. This display should be manned and have good signage to explain why the animals are kept in there, and for how long. **People can leave this display with a negative impression if their questions and concerns are not addressed.**

Possible questions:

Can she stand up? Why does she lay down all the time?
How long is she in there?
How long are the piglets with her?
How often do the piglets eat?
Why can't they go outside?
Why don't they have any straw?

- ❖ Market weight hogs should be displayed to illustrate how quickly pigs grow and the size of a market weight animal. They also help point out that the piglets don't stay 'so cute' for so long!
- ❖ Display or show pictures of research-based alternative designs of farrowing pens or housing. Explain the pros and cons of different systems.

The following is a list of suggestions for animal presentations from the Ontario Farm Animal Council's "Animals on Display" Guide.

Although the animals are on display for public education, their well-being should not be jeopardized. Human and animal safety are top priorities. Your job is to minimize stress, injuries, and animal aggression.

- **People:** Keep in mind who your visitors will be. Assume they have little or no experience with farm animals. People will walk up directly behind animals or put their fingers in pens and cages to pet or feed them. Even the quietest animal can only tolerate this for so long before they start to bite, kick, or peck in defence. Prepare for this by planning where you want people to walk and to have access to the animals. Use ropes, barriers, and double penning to control access to the animals.

- **Access to the animals:** Signs and volunteers should discourage visitors from feeding, petting, or picking up the animals. Young animals, like piglets, seem to be the most inviting.
Examples: "In the interest of animal health and safety, please do not feed the animals." "Be careful ~ this animal may bite".
- **Quiet animals:** Use animals that are accustomed to human interaction. Animals should be kept as calm and unstressed as possible. Animals should arrive at the location ahead of the event's opening. This will allow the animals time to acclimatize to new surroundings.
- **Animal health:** A sick animal reflects badly on the exhibit, the home farm, and on agriculture in general. If any animals begin to show signs of illness or stress, they should be removed immediately and/or returned home for care. Have a plan in place in case an animal gets sick or dies, including an emergency list of phone numbers with a veterinarian and a transporter who could come on short notice.
- **Code of Practice:** Pen size, number of animals per pen, food and water requirements should meet the guidelines set out in the Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs. Think about extreme temperatures (hot or cold), and try to position pigs away from drafts.
- **Pens:** Keep animals in appropriate pens. Use strong penning with no sharp edges that will keep animals in and humans out! Separate different types of animals and provide plenty of space. The Old MacDonald's farm atmosphere is created if a number of different animals are close to each other or all in the same pen.
- **Feed and Water:** Always have a constant supply of water available whenever possible. If pails are used, they should be secured to avoid spillage. **Visitor complaints about animals on display are most frequently about the animals having no feed or water.** Set up displays of what each animal eats, how often, and in what quantity in a day.
- **Bedding:** Use similar bedding methods to those on the farm. If conditions require no bedding, explain why. Keep pens clean and dry by removing urine soaked bedding and manure frequently each day.

Designing Displays: Commonly Asked Questions

Source: Ontario Farm Animal Council, Animals on Display Guide

1. What is the most common mistake in agricultural awareness activities?

The most common mistake is to try to give the visitor a lifetime experience in one short visit. Start with the basics. For example, “Did you know a pig can grow to weigh more than you in just 5 months?” instead of a session on all the breeds of pigs and genetic improvement. If your visitor leaves with one new idea and a positive feeling about farming, then your task has been accomplished!

2. I only have a small space and a limited budget, where do I begin?

One person can make a difference! Putting educational signs around a livestock exhibit barn is a great start. The two most education packed animal exhibits that can fit in a 10' x 10' space are: a sow in a farrowing pen, and a dairy calf in a hutch. Both displays will attract attention and get out important messages on animal housing, health, and nutrition. Good signs and volunteers are critical at both of these displays.

3. Should we promote food at the animal displays?

The objective of an education area is to build understanding and appreciation of agriculture. This should not be confused with selling a product. As soon as you switch from ‘educating’ to ‘selling’, you will lose credibility with the public. Farmers are consistently ranked as one of the most believable sources for information. If the public thinks you are just telling them the animals are treated well so they will buy a pork chop, your objectives will not be met. You are not trying to avoid the important connection of ‘where our food comes from’. However, you are remaining credible by talking about what you know: farming. Keep recipes and food related information at a food stand, preferably staffed by someone who is qualified to answer questions on issues such as nutrition or food preparation.

4. **Should we allow people to pet the animals?** Children of all ages enjoy petting the animals. It is important, however, to convey the message that farm animals are not pets. Health, safety, and stress of both humans and animals need to be considered. Do not allow people to pick up the piglets!!! Post hand-washing signs near the animals and bath rooms or hand-washing stations at the event. It's not uncommon to see a child with an ice cream in one hand while petting an animal with the other. You can also have waterless wash towellettes available.
5. **How do we make "Old MacDonald's" farm educational?** Many fairs and events have had petting zoos or "Old MacDonald's" farm displays in the past. The focus in these areas has changed from 'pet the animals' to 'learn about farm animals'. This is a much-needed change as we try to bridge the gap between the average consumer and the agri-food industry. Display animals as they would be on a working farm. Don't give them pet or human characteristics. Choose an educational message suitable for your audience and focus displays and signs on getting that message out.
6. **How do we deal with complaints?** Be positive and proactive. Invite the local humane society or other appropriate officials to tour through the area before the event begins. Keep your barn in order: ensure pen sizes and stocking densities conform to the Code of practice. Display clean, healthy animals with appropriate feed, water, and housing to prevent problems before they occur. Ask complainants to put their grievances in writing. Prepare to deal with legitimate concerns immediately. The most important aspect of dealing with a complaint is your attitude. Take all complaints seriously, and take the time to educate the person if the situation should not be a cause for concern.
7. **How do we know if we're successful?** It's important to measure if you are indeed meeting the needs of your chosen audience as well as your own objectives. Comment books can be set out at each display as a valuable tool for people to express their opinions in. These books are particularly important for gathering criticisms that visitors may not feel comfortable telling a volunteer. Survey visitors, exhibitors, and volunteers to find out their ideas for improvement. Evaluating your event is key for measuring your success and building towards the future.

For more information contact: Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC)

Phone: 905.821.3880 Fax: 905.858.1589

www.ofac.org

