
Five Freedoms of Animal Care

The Gage County Fair and Expo is on the horizon. Part of my job is to help coordinate the 4-H program. In a recent interview a candidate for the University of Nebraska Dean of Extension position cited an inscription on the wall of the Lexington, Nebraska 4-H Building, "*It is not what the 4-H member does to the calf that really matters, it is what the calf does to the 4-H member*". The 4-H/FFA programs are about little successes in the project which lead to bigger successes in life. All 4-H and FFA members showing livestock in Gage County are required to complete a one hour Quality Assurance training course. In some way every year I cite the importance of daily chores for project successes and animal care. It really does not matter whether you have 20 broiler chickens, a lamb, a goat, a calf, a dog or a cat, if you do not enjoy daily chores, you should not be entrusted with animals. Commercial farms with hundreds or thousands of animals have to enjoy daily chores to be successful. The animal has to be successful before the farmer or rancher can be successful.

The same premise is used in the cattle industry to promote the "Five Freedoms" of cattle welfare in the raising and care of animals. Dan Thomson, DVM, PhD, Beef Cattle Institute, Kansas State University, says the five freedoms were determined by the Farm Animal Welfare Council as things we need to be sure to provide for farms animals under our care. "*They are a statement of common sense in animal care,*" Thomson says. Developed in 1983 by the United Kingdom Farm Animal Welfare Council, the Five Freedoms for Farm Animals are:

- ◆◆◆ 1. Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition.
- ◆◆◆ 2. Freedom from environmental challenge (discomfort)
- ◆◆◆ 3. Freedom from disease, injury and functional impairment
- ◆◆◆ 4. Freedom to express normal behavior
- ◆◆◆ 5. Freedom from anxiety, fear, pain and distress

"*We do a great job providing these for beef cattle,*" Thomson says. "*The Beef Quality Assurance training and the new self-assessment tools for feedyards, stockers and cow-calf operations were founded on these principles.*" The Beef Cattle Institute just finished assessing approximately 80% of the fed cattle capacity in Kansas and found that producers are doing a fantastic job of providing these five freedoms. "*I really commend people like Tom Noffsinger and Temple Grandin for their hard work on educating people on cattle behavior and cattle handling,*" Thomson says. "Our cattle handling practices in feedyards is outstanding." But there's always room for improvement. Thomson says a couple of areas of animal welfare interest in the future of the beef industry include examining cattle comfort from environmental stressors such as heat stress or mud, decreasing stress associated with castration/dehorning and preventing respiratory diseases through preconditioning cattle prior to entering the marketing system.

Our current drought situation points out the breadth of work involved in assuring animals are cared for well. Pastures are drying up requiring water hauling, alternate feed options or drylotting cattle. Handling heat stress for confined animals is essential. Planning for alternate options for cattle feed is a major task requiring creative tasks, far from routine work.

Paul C Hay, Extension Educator

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Gage County • 1115 West Scott Street, Beatrice NE 68310

(402) 223-1384 • FAX: (402) 223-1370 • email: phay1@unl.edu

