



# Beef Grooming, Fitting and Showmanship



## A Guide for Beginning Beef Cattle Exhibitors

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### **Introduction and Purpose:**

Over the past few years there has been little or no resource material on fitting (grooming) and showing of beef steers and heifers for youth that are beginning the beef program. Therefore most youth and adults have many various methods of fitting beef cattle. Youth beginning the program do not have the knowledge or skill to properly fit and/or show their projects.

### **Objective:**

The objective of this guide is to give youth of Webster and Clay counties resource and reference material that will help them learn:

- How to fit and show beef steers and heifers for the junior agriculture programs (4-H & FFA)
- How to present a beef steer and heifer, as well as the exhibitor, to their best advantage in the show ring.
- Proper show ring etiquette.
- The intent of this document is to take you step by step through the fitting and showmanship process beginning with washing your beef project and ending up with teaching you basic showmanship skills that will help you present your animal in the show ring.

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### **- Equipment Needed for Fitting -**

*(Some of the equipment listed may or may not be needed, depending on the breed and type of animal exhibited)*

## ***BRUSHES***

### **- brushes (assortment: rice root, synthetic fiber, wash brushes)**

A Rice root brush is one of the most important grooming materials that is needed when training the hair of the animal. Brush the hair of the animal forward with the rice root brush. The brush will help remove the dead hair from the animal, as well as, training the hair to stand up straight.

A wash brush (one made of plastic with soft bristles or a wash plastic wash mitt) is just what it sounds like a brush used when washing cattle. Brushing during the washing process helps the exhibitor get the cattle cleaner. Scrub the entire animal thoroughly, head, neck, face, feet, legs, and etc., in order to clean it properly.



## ***COMBS***

### **-Scotch combs (regular and fluffer combs)**

Scotch combs are used when grooming the cattle's hair. Run the comb in a forward and upward direction. The points of the combs can be very sharp so the exhibitor must be gentle with the cattle. Most exhibitors prefer to have two of these combs available - one for grooming body hair and one for using with adhesives in grooming leg and tail head hair.

A fluffer comb is used much like that of the regular scotch comb, but it's teeth are set further apart allowing the hair of the animal to pop or "fluff" as the comb is run through the hair.



## ***BLOW DRYER***

This piece of equipment helps dry the beef project after they have been washed or rinsed, helps clean the hair of dust and foreign matter and is a valuable aid in training the hair. It is advisable to purchase a blower that has not only a blower but also a heating element to speed the drying process.



## ***CLIPPERS***

There is a WIDE variety of clippers on the market today for use on livestock projects. It is best to choose a set of clippers with a good motor and interchangeable heads. Heads can be changed for clipping longer body hair or for close clipping of hair on such body parts as the head and tail.



## ***SCISSORS***

Scissors can be a very valuable tool as well when it comes to "fine-tuning" your final clip job. Be sure to invest in a pair that is sharp and able to cut through the sticky adhesives used on legs and tail heads.



## ***SHOW HALTERS***

Show halters come in all kinds, colors, and sizes. The most commonly used halter in today's show ring is a black rolled-nose leather halter with a short lead.



## **- GROOMING PRODUCTS -**

*Soaps, adhesives, coat enhancing products and other grooming items*

### **SOAPS/SHAMPOOS**

Use a mild soap product (i.e. dish soap or shampoo) or other inexpensive soaps for general washing.

Use a commercial livestock shampoo only when necessary due to its tendency to be very drying; stripping the natural oils from the hair coat.

### **ADHESIVES**

*There are three types of adhesives used today for grooming of beef cattle.*

Standard or Leg Adhesive - this type of adhesive is rather heavy and slower to dry than other types and some exhibitors prefer to use this type on the legs. If only one kind of adhesive can be purchased, the standard type will do for most general purpose use.

Tail Adhesive - this adhesive is another heavy type adhesive, but with a very unique quality; IT DRIES QUICKLY. It is generally used to set tail heads and in forming the bush of the tail. Tail adhesive may be applied to leg hair when a fuller leg appearance is needed.

Body Adhesive - this type of adhesive is very light and dries slowly. It is useful in setting body hair and it allows for easy combing through the hair even after it has set.

### **ADHESIVE REMOVER**

Adhesive Remover - A good commercial adhesive remover is a must to take the show day preparations out of cattle to insure the quality of hair after the show.

### **SHOW FOAMS/SHAVING CREAM**

Show Foams/Shaving Cream - These are generally applied only on the day of show and are used to work up and set hard to manage hair, (i.e. to take out the cow-licks).

### **SPRAYS/OILS/HAIR COAT ENHANCEMENTS**

These products are all typically used to add sheen and luster to the hair coat of animals. Reading of the label of each product is necessary to determine the use of the product. Some products can be used daily for hair training purposes, while others are only to be used the day of show.

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## ***Starting Out With Your Beef Project***

### **- Grooming -**

To become really good at grooming, one must first form a mental picture of how the finished animal (after you have completed your grooming tasks) should look. REMEMBER - No two animals are exactly alike and therefore no two animals should be fitted alike. The whole purpose of fitting and grooming beef animals is to make them look attractive. Study your animal and evaluate its' strong and weak points as compared to the ideal animal that you have formed a mental picture of. Plan how to groom the animal by making the weak points look as good as possible and accentuating the strong points.

However there is a BIG difference in hair types in animals. Grooming heifers and steers varies vastly between breeds, but the big difference is between the long-haired British and European breeds and the American short-haired breeds.

Long-haired breeds usually show with the hair combed/brushed up while the short-haired breeds are shown with the hair brushed down for a slick, more natural appearance.

Time of year also plays a MAJOR role in grooming. Animals may have more or less hair depending on weather conditions. For example, a animal will typically have less hair in the summer months do to higher temperatures than in the cooler fall and winter months.

The following steps will take exhibitors from the wash rack to the show ring. We will discuss in section washing, blow drying, combing, clipping, fitting, and presenting your animal for show.

### ***STEP # 1 - WASHING***



*Applying soap into water stream will help to evenly distribute over the body of the animal.*



*Pay special attention to areas such as the head, make sure that you scrub them adequately to remove all dirt and any other foreign matter.*

Washing consists of cleaning the mud, manure, and dirt from the animal/s hair. It is also beneficial in stimulating hair growth. This is a very simple procedure but, you may get very wet at times. You will need the following when washing you animal: water hose, shampoo of you choice (try not to use harsh oil cutting shampoos), and a wash brush. While in the wash rack, secure your animal to the pipe stanchion to restrict his/her movement. Sometimes the wash racks at shows are very full so please try to be considerate of others and wait you turn. Once the animal is secure then wet the entire animal. While you are spraying water on the animal, squirt the soap in the stream of the water. This will evenly disburse the soap on the entire body of the animal. Now comes the important part, take your scrub brush and scrub the entire body of the animal. Don't forget about the face, legs, and underline. It is very important that you get all of these places very clean. Also, don't be afraid to scrub hard, you will not hurt your animal at all. Some kids will just use their hands to wash the animal, much like they wash their own hair, this method however, will not cut the mustard. You must scrub hard. After you have completely washed the animal, rinse all of the soap from the body of the animal. If you do not remove all of the soap residue from the hair coat, your animal may end up with a bad case of dandruff, which can make the animal's hair coat to look "flakey".

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## ***STEP #2 - BLOW DRYING***



The next step that you must take is blow-drying your beef project. Common mistakes in blow drying are: drying in an inconsistent manner, and leaving parts of the animal wet. This is commonly the face, legs, and/or belly. Make sure that you dry the entire hair coat completely. You must be consistent when drying the hair of an animal. If you are not, the hair will be going in a thousand different directions. Start drying from the front of the animal and work your way back. It is imperative that you keep the direction of the nozzle in a 30 - 45 angle, much like when you are combing. You may decide to brush or comb while blow drying your animal as well; this will aid in training the hair even more.

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## ***STEP #3 - BRUSHING/COMBING***



### ***Training the hair***

Brushing/Combing is a very important step in training the hair of the animal. Before you begin the hair training procedures, make sure your calf is broke to tie. Nothing stimulates hair growth (in long haired animals) like brushing or combing. Brushing is the only way to get the thick coat which is desired. A good hair coat is your best tool to use in covering many of your calf's minor faults. However, don't think just because your calf has a lot of hair that it will hide every fault. You should brush your animal daily to maintain optimal hair coat. We suggest that you brush your hair each time you feed you calf (which should be twice a day). It is best to wet the animal before you begin combing or brushing the hair. The hair training program should begin as soon as you get a gentle handle on your calf. Generally, cattle should be brushed and combed forward, and slightly up, at a 30-45 degrees angle. Comb the entire body of the animal and don't forget the inside and outside of the legs. To promote hair growth in warm weather, try to keep your animal cool, and increase the number of times per day you wet down and brush the steer or heifer. It is best to work the hair in the coolest part of the day, early in the morning and late in the evening. If you are brushing the animal adequately you will wear out a rice root brush in a single show season.

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## ***STEP # 4 - CLIPPING***



Clipping should only be done after the animal is thoroughly clean and dry. There are several different types and styles of clippers which can be used for beef cattle. There are two basic types of heads for clipping cattle. The first is referred to as the cattle or beef head. It is flat and is used for clipping areas that are to be shaved such as the belly, brisket, head and tail. The other type of head is known as the sheep head. This head is used for clipping body hair, or clipping legs. Clipping can be done several times before the major shows. For those of you that attend progress shows in your community, then your calf should be clipped prior to those shows. Before you attend county fair any of the major shows in Nebraska, you should clip your beef heifer 7-10 days before the show. You can do touch up work a day or two prior to the show. Remember if you are showing steers then you must determine before the show if it is a slick sheer show or if the animals can be shown with hair. If it is a slick sheer show then you need to clip the animal several days before the show. Clipping can be the most rewarding and challenging part of this whole process. Patience and practice are the two most important parts of the clipping process. It sure feels great to see the appearance changes in your cattle while you are clipping.

This is very rewarding to see progress. I recommend that before you start clipping your animal, first you must step back and evaluate the strengths and faults of the animal. You must enhance the strong points and try to disguise the weak points. Always remember that no two animals are clipped exactly alike. Once you start clipping always clip against the natural contour of the hair to achieve a close, smooth job.

### ***CLIPPING THE HEAD***

A. Clip the face from the poll forward using the beef head clippers or a small set of clippers. I use a small set that is not very loud because it does not scare the cattle as much.

B. Clip from the face down the dewlap to the brisket. This clip gives a long neck look when it is blended down into the brisket.

### ***CLIPPING THE BODY***

A. If you have never clipped an animal before we recommend that you use two hands, one for steadying the clippers and the other to hold them. Put your free hand under your clippers to help you guide your way through the hair.

B. Always work one area at a time. Evaluate the area that you're finished, if you are satisfied you may move to the next section. Remember you can always go back after you have finished.

### ***CLIPPING THE BODY (Continued)***

C. When clipping the top line try to make the heifer or steer look square over the top.

D. Always try to make the entire body of the animal look square. This is very important especially over the top line and in the hindquarters.

E. The hip hair is important to give the animal a level hip. It is left long and blended into the hip and hindquarter. The area close to the tail is trimmed very short. It is recommended to just clip only one to two clipper widths wide. This adds thickness and dimension.

F. When clipping the legs make them look as square as possible. Try to make them look like 4 x 4 post. Never take off too much of the hair when clipping the legs, you will shape them and take more hair off during the fitting process. If you take off too much hair on the legs then you will have nothing to work with later.

G. When clipping always try to blend in every part of the animal's body. Never have hard lines. Make the animal look as natural as possible.

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## ***- Fitting Your Calf for Show -***

### **- Show Day Preparation -**

Fitting should be done on the day of show. Fitting your animal consists of pulling the hair up on the legs, hindquarters, and tail head. As you pull the hair up on the legs with your scotch comb, spray adhesive on the hair in order to make it hold. The adhesive is basically a strong hair spray, which can be bought at show supply dealers at the shows. When we talk about pulling the legs, I am talking about long haired cattle. Before you begin working the legs or any other body parts you must first wash and blow dry the hair thoroughly. You need to allow yourself plenty of time to do this. One suggestion we often make is to wash your animal the night before and bed them down in clean shavings. If you do this, then the next morning, if they're not too dirty, all you have to do is blow the dirt off your animal and start preparing them for show. Generally most kids wash their animals the morning of the show.

### **Leg Preparation –**

Boning and clipping the legs promotes straightness and eye appeal. Use a leg adhesive product that can look natural to hold the leg hair in place. Don't just glob it on try to make it look as natural as possible. Remember always work small areas at a time.

Spray adhesive on the leg and pull through with a scotch comb. If you have been training the hair all along it will look sharp. Remember to pull up and forward. You need to bone the legs up to the twist, which is about halfway up the hindquarter. After you bone the legs you will need to shape them with the clippers. As mentioned earlier make the legs look as straight as possible.

## The Body –

Grooming the body is really simple. All you need to do is take your scotch comb and comb upward and forward. Just as you did in the training process. You then spray an oil base conditioner, like Final Bloom or Final Touch, on the hair coat. Whichever product you use will be fine.

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# ***SHOWMANSHIP***

The purpose of showmanship is to present an animal in a manner that will develop the most favorable impression on the judge. Showing beef steers and heifers properly is an important part of your beef project and an extremely rewarding experience. Beef cattle showmanship not only generates enthusiasm and competition within the show ring, but also teaches other valuable lessons that can be applied to everyday life. These lessons include accepting responsibility, winning graciously, losing with dignity, and learning the amount of work and determination it takes to become a winner.

Success in the show ring begins at home. Good showmanship isn't difficult, but it does take a lot of patience, determination and **HARD WORK!** It takes time to halter break your animal so that it is responsive to your hand movements on the show halter, or, to a show stick. Your heifer or steer should be trained to walk, stop and be set up easily and quickly when commanded. Make sure your animal is well-accustomed to being handled with both a show halter and a show stick prior to entering the ring. In addition, your animal should also be accustomed to handling by another person. The judge will then be able to perform a close inspection without interruption or fear of injury. In preparing for a show, practice often with your animal in several short periods rather than a few long, drawn-out practice sessions.

Once your animal has been halter broken, it should be taught to stop and lead with its head up in a natural and attentive position. Rope halters may be used at any time before a show, but, it is advisable to start practicing with a show halter at least two weeks prior to a show.



When leading, hold the halter strap in your right hand, 6 to 12 inches away from the animal's head. (*When using a show halter this would be where the leather lead strap connects with the chain*) Keeping this distance will serve several purposes:

1. It will help keep the animal calm and minimize unnecessary movement
2. Will give enough distance between you and the animal so that the judge can critique your project.