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Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service • Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

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The 4-H Bucket Calf Project is designed to introduce youth 7 to 12 years old to beef and dairy 4-H projects. By allowing younger children the experience of working with a smaller, less intimidating size of animal, they become comfortable with beef and dairy cattle as they grow. This is designed to be a short-term project with calves purchased in May and finalized with showing at the local county fair.

A bucket calf is an orphan or newborn calf purchased when they are 1 to 10 days old. The calves may be male or female, beef or dairy. The calves are started on a bottle (or bucket) and nipple.

Calves should be purchased between May 1 and May 30 of the current year. Counties can tag the calves at the end of May or the first of June to verify ownership. This may be done at a central location or tags may be given to club project leaders who tag the calves for participants. Four-H members will show their calves at the county fair in the fall (August to September). But there are some things you need to know, as you get ready for the show.

Training Your Calf to Lead

One of the first things you can do with your bucket calf is train it to lead. Training a calf to lead is sometimes time consuming and some calves will test your patience. However, after a few short lessons, you will be amazed at how well your calf responds to your training.

If you are raising your calf from birth, there are some things you can do to help when the time comes for training the calf to lead. During the milk feeding period, your calf will become gentler if you will pet it while feeding. Also, this is a good time to train the calf with a halter. Start by teaching it to follow the bottle and control the calf with the halter.

At this time the calf is small enough to be easily controlled. If your calf is older and has never been tied, start by tying the calf in a shed with feed and water until it is accustomed to being tied. If your calf is accustomed to being tied, a good way to train your calf to lead is to keep the calf tied in a shed where it can be fed but not watered. Then, morning and evening you can lead your calf to water. After a few trips to water, the calf will soon respond to this reward. When you return from watering your calf, reward it with feed and give it a good brushing.

Showing Your Bucket Calf

In the beginning, you may need some help from someone to gently push your calf from behind. Try to lead your calf by not tugging hard on the halter. Instead, most of the pressure to encourage the calf to move should come from behind by someone pushing your calf. Remember, your calf will respond to kindness and praise better than to harsh treatment. When tying your calf, a rope halter is alright if the calf does not struggle too much, in which case, the rope may irritate the bridge of its nose and cause a sore. A strap halter or one with some cushioning is recommended if the calf fights the halter when tied.

Washing Your Calf

Washing your calf can be fun. But it can also be dangerous. This is not a time for games. Move slowly, so you do not frighten the calf.

Step 1: Put a nylon halter on your calf, as a rope halter will swell once it gets wet. Tie the calf leaving only a few inches of room on the rope. This will keep the calf from moving around.

Step 2: Fill a wash bucket with water from the hose and add enough livestock soap to form a lather. Use only soap that is recommended for livestock. Do not put the soap directly on the calf as it may irritate the skin and cause dandruff and scaling.

Step 3: Before wetting down the calf use the scotch comb and rice root brush to remove as much of the mud and dirt accumulated on the body of your calf as possible. Turn the hose on medium pressure and use your finger to form a spray or use a spray nozzle on the hose. Starting at the calf's feet, wet its legs all around. Then slowly wet its underline and work up the body toward the topline. Last, wet its head, holding the ears cupped closed with your hand. Do not get water into the calf's ears. If water enters the calf's ear, its ear will hang down. If the water is allowed to remain, there is danger of infection. Once again, use the scotch comb to remove any mud on the calf.

Step 4: Using the sponge or rag, apply soapy water from the wash bucket to the calf and scrub the calf with the rubber brush. Wash the legs and underline as well as the sides and topline. When you wash the head, again, be careful so that you do not get water or soap in its ears.

Step 5: To rinse the calf, work from the top down. First, rinse the head, cupping the ears closed with your hand. Then starting at the topline, rinse the soap completely out of the calf's hair coat. Pay careful attention to this step, since any soap left will cause dandruff.

Step 6: Empty out the wash bucket and rinse it well. Then fill it with clean water and put one capful of fly repellent or livestock dip into the water. Carefully and slowly, pour the dip over the calf's topline, starting at the shoulders and pouring toward the rump. Don't pour this mixture on its head. This will cut down on the number of flies attacking your calf and will help with grooming the hair.

Step 7: The last step is to brush and dry your calf. Using a scotch comb followed by a rice root brush, comb the hair on the body and legs with the lay of the hair. Brush or comb until the hair is smooth.

Going to the Fair

Things to know

Is there a pre-entry form due for bucket calves? What are the health requirements? Do you need a Certificate of Health from a veterinarian? When are bucket calves allowed to arrive and get stall assignments? How long do the calves have to stay at the fair? What is the release date and time? Are there any parking requirements or permits for trailers? What does the calf need for bedding at the fair? Will there be pens or will the calves be tied? What day and time is the Bucket Calf Show? What are the rules and age divisions?

Read your fairbook. Your County Extension Educator can help answer your questions.

What to Take

1. **Calf and halter.**
2. **Tack box** – The tack box is a box used to carry equipment needed at a show. You can pack your tack box with the following items:

Wash brush or rubber comb: use it to get your animal clean when washing—be sure it is sturdy enough to get wet.

Soap: you will need to use soap for washing a day or two before the show.

Currycomb: one for grooming when hair is long.

Feed pans: one for each animal.

Rice root brush: at least one, use it to groom your animal to obtain a shiny hair coat.

Water hose and spray nozzle: to wash your animal.

Padlock: to lock your tack box and keep supplies safe.

Magic marker and stall cards: to hang above your animal in the stall for identification.

Spare rope halters: in case the one your animal is wearing breaks.

Water buckets: not a 5-gallon bucket, but one that a calf can get its head into all the way to the bottom.

Rags: these come in handy to wipe ears and clean hooves and noses before show.

Staple gun, duct tape, baling wire: these come in handy for putting up stall cards and making minor adjustments to pens and equipment.

Neck rope: used as a safety precaution when calf is tied in an open stall. This rope is attached loosely around the neck in addition to the halter and both are tied to the fence.

First Aid kit: For you—in case of minor accidents.

3. **Feed** – Take more than you think you will need.
4. **Water** – If your calf is on well water at home it may not want to drink the chlorinated water at the fairgrounds. (It will smell funny to them.) You may want to take water from home for them to drink.
5. **Bedding** – Find out if you need wood chips, straw, or if cattle will bed on sand provided by the fair.
6. **Shovel, rake, and wheelbarrow** – These are items you will need to keep your calf's pen/stall clean. Clean your area once a day and immediately remove any manure as it occurs.
7. **Lawn chairs, food, and drinks** – You will be at the fair for long periods each day.

At the Fair

Locate the area that bucket calves are stalled. Look for stall assignments or if calves are stalled by 4-H club. Prepare your stall area with bedding and introduce your calf to its temporary home. Unload your tack, equipment, and feed then make your area clean and neat. Put up stall cards with your name and club information. Make yourself and those around you comfortable.

Show Day

Know what time the show starts. Give yourself plenty of time to wash your calf and let it dry completely before the show. Comb the hair and wipe the nose, ears, and hooves clean. Listen for announcements and have someone keeping track of how fast other classes are proceeding. Arrive early for your class. Watch how the other classes are handled. Be patient. Wait your turn and be courteous to other exhibitors and show management.

In Class

This is a slow process. The judge will talk to each exhibitor individually. Wait patiently for your turn. When your turn comes – look the judge in the eye.

- Talk loud enough for the judge to hear you.
- Answer all questions honestly.
- If you don't know the answer, just say so.
- Smile and have a good time.
- The judge wants you to do well as much as you do.
- Thank the judge when you are dismissed.

Follow the instructions of the ring stewards and wait for everyone to finish. When results are announced, congratulate other exhibitors and exit the arena. Everyone is a winner when you participate in the bucket calf project.

After the Show

When your calf is released from the fair, clean your area and load all equipment and supplies, along with your calf and take them home. Give a project talk at your local club meeting about your bucket calf project. Fill out a record book for county awards. This will complete your bucket calf project for the year.

What the Ribbons Mean

Blue - You have successfully completed the bucket calf project and have exceeded required knowledge expectations.

Red - You have successfully completed the bucket calf project and have met all requirements.

White - You have successfully completed the bucket calf project, but you need to be more aware of activities involving ownership, management, nutrition, or health care for your calf.

Green (Participation) - All youth who are 7 to 8 years old will receive the same colored participation ribbon. This is because peer competition is generally not developmental appropriate for children under the age of nine.

Reference

Adapted from the Kansas Dairy Leaders Notebook.

The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

Bringing the University to You!

The Cooperative Extension Service is the largest, most successful informal educational organization in the world. It is a nationwide system funded and guided by a partnership of federal, state, and local governments that delivers information to help people help themselves through the land-grant university system.

Extension carries out programs in the broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment; family and consumer sciences; 4-H and other youth; and community resource development. Extension staff members live and work among the people they serve to help stimulate and educate Americans to plan ahead and cope with their problems.

Some characteristics of the Cooperative Extension system are:

- The federal, state, and local governments cooperatively share in its financial support and program direction.
- It is administered by the land-grant university as designated by the state legislature through an Extension director.
- Extension programs are nonpolitical, objective, and research-based information.
- It provides practical, problem-oriented education for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.
- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
- More than a million volunteers help multiply the impact of the Extension professional staff.
- It dispenses no funds to the public.
- It is not a regulatory agency, but it does inform people of regulations and of their options in meeting them.
- Local programs are developed and carried out in full recognition of national problems and goals.
- The Extension staff educates people through personal contacts, meetings, demonstrations, and the mass media.
- Extension has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs. Activities shift from year to year as citizen groups and Extension workers close to the problems advise changes.

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