

Extension Agent Responsibilities at Mississippi 4-H Livestock and Horse Shows



Mississippi State University Extension Service personnel have a longstanding, proud, and successful history of providing stellar leadership and direction in conducting 4-H livestock and horse shows. This rich heritage and expectation of dedicated service to young people all across our state continues today.

This is a tremendous responsibility, since these shows serve as an educational tool to help 4-H'ers develop into productive citizens through working with their animal(s) while educating them and their families about the important economic contributions livestock and horse enterprises make to local, state, national, and global economies.

The Extension organization as a whole, as well as individual employees of the Extension Service, have the task of managing, conducting, and participating in these shows to make them successful events. During these shows, many youth, families, and other patrons, notice our organizational, management, and leadership skills, so it is critical we always put our best efforts into each event at the shows.

Your involvement in 4-H livestock and horse shows can vary. If you are hosting a county or local show, you may be responsible for complete management of the show. If so, you must address numerous tasks, details, and responsibilities before and during the show in order to have a smooth, well-run event. However, if the show is one in which your county is participating (such as district or state show), your involvement will be different, yet your assignments and responsibilities as an Extension agent are still just as important in having a successful show. The perspective of involvement will be discussed further.

Most 4-H livestock and horse shows are organized and managed by the Mississippi State University Extension Service. This means that you, as a 4-H agent or Extension employee with 4-H responsibilities, assist in assignments as directed by show managers (following approval of Research and Extension Center heads) to do your part in each show. Make every attempt to be prepared and willing to work at these shows, because it is your show you are helping to conduct.

Whether or not you are aware at the time, 4-H'ers, parents, and volunteers in your county are watching your work ethic and attitude. Their perceptions of your performance have a direct impact on your exposure and reputation as the leader of your county. Take pride in your work! In addition to your work assignments at these shows, you as an Extension agent have a number of things to do and know about the shows to make sure your exhibitors, parents, and volunteers are properly prepared before heading to and during the show.

The following guidelines provide the necessary tools to help you be a successful Extension agent assisting with or conducting livestock and horse shows.

- **Obtain and study a copy of the rules and regulations for the show.** Be sure all exhibitors (and their families) have their own copy of the rules and regulations for each show. Become familiar with rules for the shows. It is not expected that you have rules and regulations memorized, but be familiar enough with the rule book to be able to quickly find the rule in addressing the issue in question. Many problems show management face deal with show participants who do not understand or know the rules governing the show. Such "people problems" can be a challenge for you as well, if you are not familiar with the rulebook. It is important that as an Extension agent and leader of the 4-H program in your county you feel comfortable with the rules of the show. Your exhibitors have more respect for you when they recognize you are prepared. Be prepared!
- **Know the prospective exhibitors in your county.** Be sure all prospective exhibitors are aware of show dates, rules for the show, and entry deadlines. You can distribute much of this information in newsletters to exhibitors and their families. Often it is necessary to send information out more than once before you receive responses from prospective exhibitors. You may choose to have a county meeting to distribute critical show information to exhibitors and reinforce deadlines so problems can be minimized. Be sure to document and file materials sent to exhibitors in case they claim they did not receive information about a show. Be a responsible leader for your county!
- **Know all entry deadlines.** It is your responsibility to make sure entries are submitted on time. Establish an earlier deadline for your county so you have enough time to be sure all of your exhibitors' entries are in order before the entry deadline. It takes time to process entries before the shows, and it is important you and your exhibitors respect these deadlines. Make sure you are familiar with and understand the online entry process for livestock and horse shows.

A word of advice is to not wait until the last minute to try to submit all entries. Instead, process entries into the computer as they come in to your office. Sometimes, county office staff may submit entries. This is acceptable, but the responsibility for entries remains on the 4-H agent or Extension employee with 4-H re-

sponsibilities. This individual should sign the printed summary of entries for mailing to the Extension 4-H livestock specialist, verifying that all entries are complete and accurate. Exhibitors want to be sure their animal(s) are entered in the appropriate class. When the exhibitors or family members turn in entries, take a moment to review the documents to make sure you understand the information in an attempt to prevent potential problems. Take PRIDE in your work!

- **Print a copy of exhibitors, animals, and classes entered to take with you to the show.** You never know when you might need this printout of exhibitor information and copies of nomination forms. It is always best to have information available to you rather than have an issue arise and not have paperwork to verify entries as they were submitted. Take PRIDE in your work!
- **Know the schedule of the show.** Numerous deadlines and events take place during a typical 4-H livestock or horse show. Often the schedule of the show is in the premium book or rulebook. Keep a copy with you so you know when and where your exhibitors are supposed to be with their animals for show or educational contests. Some animals have to be weighed, measured, or go through other procedures to be officially checked-in, so make sure you and your exhibitors know when and where to be to avoid conflicts. Sometimes you may take exhibitors to the shows or other events and they will need assistance and supervision until their families arrive. Always be prepared, and keep a schedule within reach to help your exhibitors. Take PRIDE in your work!
- **Supervise your exhibitors and their exhibits in the barns.** It is important for exhibitors to be respectful of each other at the show. Make sure your exhibitors keep their animal(s) and their assigned pens, stalls, and aisles clean and neat. Much time and effort goes into assigning pen and stall space, so encourage your exhibitors to respect each other's assigned space. Patrons attending the shows typically walk through the barns to view the animals, and the cleanliness of your county's animals and exhibits is a direct reflection on you. Be a RESPONSIBLE leader!

- **Encourage exhibitors to be a part of the overall show.** You may have youth who are new to livestock or horse shows, so encourage your experienced 4-H'ers to assume leadership roles and assist these individuals. This helps you and is a positive influence on your program. Be an ENCOURAGER!
- **Teach your exhibitors sportsmanship.** It is important for your exhibitors to be prepared, strive for excellence, and graciously accept their placing in a class or other educational contest. Make sure your exhibitors feel respected and proud of their efforts with their animal(s) after the show ends. Remember that shows are about productive development of our young people. Do your part to recognize their accomplishments properly. Be a RESPONSIBLE leader!
- **Expect to work long hours.** It is encouraging to have such a high degree of participation and interest in 4-H livestock and horse shows. Most days, some aspect of the show starts early, whether it is processing animals, checking paperwork, or starting a show. Typical days at the shows may last 10 to 12 hours or more, so be prepared to put in a full day of work. Dedication to doing your best in assignments and in helping your exhibitors succeed at the show do not go unnoticed by others. Be a TEAM PLAYER!

Remember that we are working toward a common goal at 4-H livestock and horse shows: To have a smooth, well-run event. We should never forget the most important part of the 4-H Livestock and Horse Project is the youth of Mississippi. They are our most valuable resource, and it is our responsibility and challenge now and in the future to use our leadership abilities to enhance Mississippi youth through their active participation in 4-H livestock and horse shows.

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