

Packing for a Livestock Show

By: Dan Wells, Livestock Extension Agent with NC Cooperative Extension in Johnston County

Show season is in full swing, with circuit shows and county fairs landing on our calendars, leading up to the NC State Fair. The animals have been purchased, fed, trained, groomed, clipped, washed, etc. for weeks, and now is the time to hit the road and the show ring to see how all that hard work and investment will pay off. One of the worst things that can happen is to get to a show and realize you've left some important piece of equipment or a convenience item at home or at the barn. Adding that kind of stress to the show ring jitters can really create an unpleasant experience, so here are some thoughts on packing for the show and some things to consider bringing (you may want to create a checklist, it can really help in the days leading up to a show!)

First of all, make sure the animals are prepared. Washing and clipping before a show can be a big help, and really reduce the amount of work involved on show day. This isn't to say there won't be some touch-up needed on show day, but you definitely can't pull an animal off pasture the morning of the show and expect it to look good in the showmanship drive. Have your clippers, clipper oil, towels, blower, and extension cords ready to go into the trailer. Also, if you have a generator, you might consider bringing it to the show, also. A lot of show barns have limited electrical outlets, and circuits can quickly become overloaded with fans and blowers. Having your own hose and nozzle is a good idea, too, as these are usually not made available at show barns.

Make sure you are washed and clipped, too! Have your show clothes washed and ready. Remember your show boots, belt, jeans, extra socks and a nice shirt. Having a holder for your exhibitor number is nice, too. Ladies might want to pack some extra hair ties.

It's wise to check your show ring equipment before heading out. Make sure you have all your halters, collars, show sticks, combs and brushes. And your animals still have to eat, so be prepared with extra feed and water buckets, and a supply of feed. You may want to have two sets of buckets; one for the barn, and one for the show box. Bringing your fly spray is a good idea, also, along with some supplies for treating wounds or scratches that might occur on the road or in the barn. Remember that water is the most important part of an animal's diet, and the show barn water might be distasteful to your animal. So bringing along some electrolyte or sports drink mix to flavor the water might help your stock keep up their water intake.

That takes care of the animals, now what about the people? A cooler is a great idea, with plenty of water, drinks and snacks. These are available at many shows, but can be more expensive and less convenient than bringing your own. You probably want to bring some camp chairs, bug repellent, sunscreen, and medicine for a headache or indigestion (think fair food!) It's important to have some tools, such as screwdrivers, pliers, scissors, a knife, flashlight, hole punch and a hammer and nails. Be prepared for the weather, which could mean packing raincoats, sweaters and jackets, or shorts and sunglasses. Towels, gloves, and a first aid kit can also be quite handy.

Since you've worked so hard for this experience, be prepared to remember it. Bring along your camera or video recorder, and make sure you have extra batteries, charger, memory cards, etc. Also remember your health papers, if required. There's nothing worse than traveling to a show and being turned away. It's also wise to bring a copy of the rules and schedule for the show, so you don't have to keep running to the show desk or asking someone about a particular aspect of the show.

But the most important thing anyone can bring to the show, by far, is a positive attitude and good showmanship. This is supposed to be fun, and having the wrong attitude can really make that impossible. Be prepared to help someone who is less experienced; remember you were in their place at one time, too. Remember that many of the folks working at a show are volunteering their time and labor to make the event happen, so a word of encouragement or thanks really means a lot! Be sure to thank the judge, too, even if you didn't do well in the show. Keep in mind that the winning animal or exhibitor is one person's opinion on one day, and not everyone can be in the winner's circle. The judge knows this, and odds are he or she was in your place not too long ago. Try to learn from every show ring experience, and you will find that you will get better and better!