Fitting and Showing Dairy Cattle

Extension Service
Institute of Agricultural Sciences
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FITTING AND SHOWING DAIRY CATTLE

By

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The purpose of a dairy cattle show is to encourage the breeding of good livestock. A dairy show offers an excellent opportunity to study breed type. The exhibitor should study the true-type animals of his breed. This will aid him in selecting the best type animals in his herd for showing.

True-type—Jersey

True-type—Holstein

True-type—Ayrshire

True-type—Brown Swiss

True-type—Guernsey

Much of the material for this bulletin is taken from a bulletin prepared by Otto J. Hill and J. C. Knott.
No amount of work or feed will develop an inferior animal into a show winner. Time is often wasted in fitting inferior animals. Improper fitting may keep good animals from winning.

When the animal is first stabled for fitting, it may have long, uneven hair and a hard skin. A month or six weeks is required to prepare such an animal for exhibition.

Show cattle should be housed in a barn if possible. Box stalls are preferable when available. The stall should be clean, well bedded, and dark. This will aid in keeping out flies.Removing windows and nailing burlap bags over the openings will darken the stall. Enough air will get through to provide satisfactory ventilation.

Feeding

The ration fed during the fitting period should be similar to the one to be fed at the show. Changing the formula may throw the animal off feed. A good quality legume hay and soaked beet pulp are excellent roughages. There are many satisfactory grain mixtures that can be used. In the past, rations often contained much corn or other fattening feeds. Recently there has been a tendency by breed associations and judges to discriminate against overfattened dairy cattle. The following ration is suggested, because it contains a minimum of fattening material:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mill Run or Bran</td>
<td>70 pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground Oats</td>
<td>70 pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground Barley</td>
<td>30 pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linseed Oil Meal</td>
<td>30 pounds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many other rations will be equally satisfactory.
Equipment

There are many pieces of equipment that can be used for fitting animals. The necessary equipment includes a blanket, a halter, a soft brush, a currycomb, hoof nippers, a rasp, emery paper, a bucket, and soap.

Blanketing

It is a good plan to wash and blanket an animal as soon as she is put in the fitting quarters. Blanketing makes the hide soft and pliable. It speeds the shedding of long hair and causes the hair to lie more smoothly. After blanketing is started, it should be continued until the show is over. Blankets made of burlap bags are cheap and satisfactory. An old woolen or cotton blanket may be placed under the burlap blanket. This will speed up the shedding of hair and the softening of the hide. During extremely hot weather, the extra blanket should be removed during the day.

Grooming

Grooming once daily, for a month, will make the hair glossy and the hide loose and pliable. A currycomb should be used only on the legs and flanks; otherwise more harm than good will be done. A stiff brush can be used at first to remove dirt, but a softer brush should be used later. Brushes with stiff bristles will toughen the hide rather than soften it.

To remove loose hair, a piece of rubber, such as a rubber heel, can be used instead of a brush. The rubber will also massage the hide and improve its pliability. Massaging with the hands is also good for improving the quality of the hide.

After brushing, smooth the hair lightly with a flannel cloth moistened with oil. Olive or vegetable oil is the best to use.

Washing

Showmen frequently wash the animal when fitting is started. A warm day should be selected for this job, and lukewarm water should be used. A white floating soap or tar soap is commonly
used. The first washing should be thorough. Frequent washing is undesirable, because it removes the natural skin secretions and leaves the skin dry and harsh. Stains should be washed out each day. If the switch is white, it should be washed and thoroughly bleached.

**Clipping**

In no case should the entire animal be clipped. Clippers are no substitute for grooming. The best practice is to clip the head, tail, and usually the belly. The belly of a cow should be clipped to show the milk veins. Clipping the belly of young heifers may give them a shallow-bodied appearance.

The entire head should be clipped. It is best to begin at the nose. Clip two lines to the eyes. Then clip between the lines and widen out to take in the entire head.
withers and down to the point of the shoulder, as shown in Figure 6. Leave a little ridge of hair at the junction of the shoulder and the neck. If the hair is clipped too close, the neck may look low just in front of the withers. This will give a “ewe-neck” appearance.

The tail should be clipped from a point just above the switch to the rump (Figure 7). Enough hair should be left on the tail setting to give the rump the appearance of being long and level. Unless the hair is blended off carefully at the tail setting, the animal may appear to have a sloping rump. Clipping the udders of cows or springing heifers is a desirable practice.

Animals show off to best advantage when clipped not more than three or four days before showing.

Training
The animal should be led from the left side. Cattle must be trained to pose and lead properly if they are to be shown to best.
advantage. An animal should respond to a light halter tug. Training an animal to lead is good training for the prospective showman; it requires patience and persistence.

This Not this

Fig. 9.—Training an animal to lead requires patience and persistence.
An animal should be taught to stand with its legs squarely under it, its head erect, and the top line straight. It should lead off or stop at the leader’s command. A good showman will not allow his animal to go to sleep. When a pose is broken, the animal will often stretch or get out of balance unless carefully handled. The animal should be trained so that it will pose properly when spoken to or lightly touched with hand or foot. Animals usually refuse to lead at first; patience will aid a great deal in starting the animal off properly. When they refuse to lead, it may help to take along another animal that leads well. Some showmen are handicaps to the animals. This should never be the case. A good showman will be able to show the animal’s best points at all times.

Care of the Horns

Smoothly polished horns improve the appearance of an animal. The roughest parts can be smoothed down with a fine wood file. After filing, the surface can be further improved with a wood scraper, piece of glass, or a section of a piston ring. Do not work off too much of the horn. This may weaken it, and it allows the shell to be knocked off easily.

Fine emery paper will further smooth the surface. Final polishing may be done with powdered pumice stone, metal polish, or silver

Fig. 10.—Using a hoof nipper and rasp, keep the toes trimmed so that the animal will stand squarely on all four feet.
polish. These materials should be applied to the horn as an oil paste; the polishing should be done with a flannel cloth.

**Care of the Feet**

The feet of animals that have been inside a great deal or on soft dirt may need care. Dairy cattle cannot be shown to good advantage unless their feet are properly trimmed. The toes should be trimmed back so that an animal can stand squarely on all four feet. A hoof nipper and rasp are necessary for this job.

The hoofs should be cleaned and smoothed in the same way as the horns. If they have not been fitted, a light application of oil will help to improve the appearance.

**Braiding Tails**

First, wash the switch thoroughly. While it is wet, braid it into four or five three-strand braids. This should be done the night before showing. These braids are tied with strings and not combed out until just before the time to enter the show ring.

![Figure 11](image_url)

*Fig. 11.—Just before entering the show ring, comb out the braids.*

**Final Preparations**

Give the animal a liberal feed of hay, beet pulp, and grain on the morning of the show. A medium “fill” will eliminate a gaunt look. Just before going into the ring, the animal should be given a drink.
of water. A cold drink may cause the animal to “hump up.” Too much “fill” is very undesirable, because it produces “pot bellies”; therefore, discretion should be used in the amount of drink given.

Just before entering the ring, the animal should be wiped with a slightly oiled flannel cloth. **Too much oil is very undesirable.** A small amount of oil gives the desired gloss and makes the hair lie smoothly. After the oiled cloth has been used, rubbing down with the hands will further improve the appearance. The picture on the cover shows an excellently finished animal.

**Showing in the Ring**

Enter the ring promptly when the class is called. Keep your animal moving slowly and follow the instructions of the judge. “Show” your animal during the entire judging period and while the judge is giving reasons. When the animal steps out of pose, lead her into position rather than trying to make her back up. Have your animal in a position so that the judge can see her at all times. It is very bad practice to jerk an animal. Move your animal slowly. Train her to take short steps. When in the show ring, give all your attention to your animal and the judge.

![Fig. 12.—Some showmen are handicaps to their animals.](image)

![Fig. 13.—A good showman must be a good sportsman.](image)
A good showman must be a good sportsman. Unless you can lose "with a smile," you should stay out of the show ring. Those who see their faults and learn from mistakes will improve for the next show.

**Fitting and Showmanship Score Card for Dairy Cattle**

A. **Fitting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td><strong>Condition of animal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>a. Animal in good flesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>b. Hair smooth, soft, and glossy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>c. Hide soft and pliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>Cleanliness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>a. Freedom from stains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>b. Hair clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>c. Ears clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>Clipping</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>a. Smoothness of clipping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>b. Proper margins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Condition of horns and hoofs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Dehorned animals are not scored down.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. **Showing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td><strong>Training of animal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>a. Animal leads well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>b. Ease of posing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><strong>Handling</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>a. Leading slowly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>b. Making long turns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>c. Keeping animal posed without obvious maneuvers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>d. Freedom from excessive stretching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><strong>Contestant</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>a. Dressed in white or other neat clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>b. Continuous attention to animal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>c. Keeping animal properly posed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>d. Obeying orders from judge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>e. Ease of showmanship and freedom from nervousness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>