

So you want to show cattle this year.....

By John Floyd

Showing your own cattle can be one of the most rewarding experiences in your life. Cattle that you have bred, calved, fed, raised, and prepared to show actually being judged by a professional and selected to be #1 in its category or class is a tremendous accomplishment. It takes work and dedication, so here are a few ideas on what it's all about.

Pick out your finest animals to show. If you're in doubt or not secure about your choice ask a knowledgeable friend or neighbor their opinion. Then you select.

Get the animals registered. All cattle must have registration papers to be in any ALR show or sale. This takes time so don't delay the process.

Start with the basics. Get the cattle you've chosen properly vaccinated and dewormed. We use a Safeguard brand product for deworming. It's expensive but works great. Also use a pour on right away to prevent lice from ruining the hair. Ask your local vet about vaccinations specific to your area.

So now you need to properly feed these cattle that you're going to show. There are many ways to do this. Some folks are able to use high quality hay from day one, with a good mineral and deworming program to get their cattle in good condition.

Unfortunately that doesn't work everywhere. Many times supplements are needed. Free choice Protein tubs and perhaps a good "Show Feed" fed twice a day would work for you. (Don't leave out the hay) Your local feed mill might be mixing up his own blend of show feed or your local Co-op will surely have a Brand name product for you to use. "Calf Manna" is a product that can be added or top dressed to many feed products to get your cattle in show condition.

It's better to start the animal out slow when using show feed. You don't want a fat calf, just a healthy looking one.

After you get the feeding process started, you must also start halter breaking and washing the animal. These are 2 chores you are going to love!

Your animals must be broke to lead in the ring for you to participate in the show. If you've never done this before I suggest you get some help if at all possible. There are plenty of 4H youth or FFA members who are willing to do it all or help out for modest compensation. (\$) Watch and learn or let the youngster show you how to do it.

If you're going to do this yourself try one of these methods. Get the halter on the calf so that you are leading it from the left hand side. Tie the calf to a stable post, wooden fence, or other suitable stable item. (Not your truck). The calf will pull and

pull, fight it for a couple of hours if not days. After a day or two, they'll learn there is nothing to fear and may get used to the idea of living with it. Every animal is different. Now take hold of the halter and see if you can lead the calf in a clockwise rotation. Keep the lead short so that it will not get leverage on you. This takes patience and strength. If you start out with short periods, then work into longer ones you will eventually find success.

It helps to have a hungry or thirsty animal. First thing in the morning lead your animal around some, and then lead it to water. After a short drink lead it around some, then lead it to its feed, after a short bite, lead it around some and then back to one or the other. The idea is to reward the animal for letting your lead it. Eventually the animal will think you are always going to feed it or water it and will get used to the idea of being with you. One animal will usually follow the other, so if you have a good leader and a so/so animal, let the second one follow the first till it gets the right idea.

Stay calm through out the process. Sometimes it's frustrating, but if you loose your cool the animal will sense it and now it's spooked too.

Another way to halter break calves is with the use of a donkey. Take the lead on the calf and tie it very close, 18 to 20 inches, from the donkey's halter and let them loose in the coral. The first 20 to 30 minutes are going to be very exciting as you might guess, try not to interfere, however, if you've ever owned a donkey you know he will always win. The 2 will go get a drink when the donkey wants to, they eat when the donkey wants to, get out of the sun, etc. He'll eventually have that calf following him all over the place. Keep a close eye on them and tied together for as long as you need to. When you think the calf has learned his lesson, disconnect it from the donkey and try being the leader now. It could take day, maybe 2 or 3.

There are plenty of tried and true ways to get cattle to lead. Find out what works for you and stick with it.

Now let's get these cattle cleaned up and ready for the show. There are as many hair care products for show cattle as there are for humans. Sullivan Supply is the master at selling us quality hair products, yet some people continue to use Joy dishwashing liquid. Get the animal tied up where you want to wash them, soak them down with soap and water, scrub 'em down, rinse and repeat. It will take a few good baths to get the hide and hair truly clean. At first this must be done every day possible. Not so much later if the animal stays out of the mud and manure. The cool water also helps the hair to grow. Nice hair, trimmed well shows well in the ring.

The next task it to blow dry the hair. No Prom Queen is complete until this is done. After washing, put the animal in a chute, purchase a blower, and train the hair to lay from back to front. Comb the hair forward while you're doing this. Don't be surprised if the animal gets excited about the blower initially, just stay calm, eventually your calf will trust you and enjoy the attention.

Clipping your animal to show requires some experience. There are workshops, videos, and information on the internet for resources. You may want to dive in and try it yourself. It's not impossible to do it just takes time to learn the ropes. Or you can hire a professional, watch and learn as you go.

Now you're in the show ring. Again, experience is the best teacher here. The earlier you start the more experience you'll gain. Attend some cattle shows in your area. Watch everything that goes on around you. How do the fitters wash, what do they use, how do they trim the animals? Watch and learn what they do in the show ring, how they handle their animals. Ask questions and soon you'll be a pro.

The excitement of showing your own cattle is great. The "ALL Lowline Show and Sale" in Lebanon, TN May 16th, is a perfect place to get started. We invite you to come and hopefully participate in this Lowline Event. Everyone's invited!