

# Ask A Vet: 4-H Beef Project Tips

*Sunday, October 20, 2013*

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

My son is just starting his first year in the beef project in 4-H and we are getting his steer this weekend. What things should we be doing to prepare for his arrival?

-Anxious to Start

Dear Anxious to Start,

What an exciting project to begin and congratulations on your choice. I think you will find out that being prepared and vigilant of your animal's habits and demeanor will pay great dividends to you. As with any project of this sort, it is imperative for you to start with a clean, dry stall bedded with straw and /or shavings that has fresh clean water. The most important nutrient in any animal's ration is WATER. We always recommend changing the water daily. Remember, if it looks good enough for you to drink, then it will be fine for your calf. The other important thing to find out is if your calf has already begun creep feeding (which means started on a grain diet). When an animal is brought into a new environment, they may not eat readily so you may want to start them slow with a good quality grass mix hay and some starter feed that usually has medication in it. If the calf has been started on grain, be sure to find out what he is being fed and how much so that the transition to a new place does not cause a digestive upset for the calf. Once the animal has been started on grain, you generally want to see the animal clean it up within 20 minutes. Generally, you want the animal housed in a pen big enough for them to move around comfortably such as a 10 x 12 foot pen. With our own kids in 4-H, we usually put the feed trough in the back of the pen so that they became used to a person walking in the pen with them. This was also a good way to keep our kids from just dumping the feed in and not pay attention to the calf. We always wanted to assess the animal as to whether his ears and head were up, eyes and nose clear of discharge, and how he was breathing. It was also a good way to check his feces if there was diarrhea or loose stools. Remember, would you sleep there?

Most reputable sales of club calves have had the calf go through a pre-conditioning period where the animal has been vaccinated, dehorned, castrated and dewormed before coming to the sale. Generally, this is done while the calves are still on the mother two to three weeks before they are weaned. The reason this is done is to prepare the calf well in advance of weaning so that the only future stress would be saying good-bye to momma. Preconditioned and preimmunized calves usually do eat and drink earlier at their new places and usually require less treatments for sickness. A successful project such as beef begins before you even get the calf. Thanks for your question and good luck.

-Dr. Wanda Schmeltz