

Mitigate Activist Threats at Fair & Expo Livestock Shows

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It is that time of year again that we all know and love - some call it summer and others call it the season of livestock shows. Fair and expo shows are a time for family and friends to gather, while making memories that will last a lifetime. Unfortunately, animal rights activist groups have an entirely different agenda for events like these. Whether it be national and state level livestock shows, or junior shows and county fairs, animal rights activists are increasingly showing up attempting to disrupt and promote their agenda of total animal liberation. Both fair organizers and youth exhibitors need to be prepared for potential activist activity.



4-H & FFA participant showing her beef project at a local county fair.

Animal rights groups such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and Direct Action Everywhere (DXE), do not believe there is a humane way to raise livestock and poultry for any purpose and use many different tactics to target animal agriculture – from ballot initiatives, pressure campaigns on brands and

undercover videos to college outreach, “humane education” and targeting youth. In some cases, animal rights activists have contacted youth participants via social media urging them to surrender their livestock project to the activist organization while claiming the animals are being mistreated and that 4-H and FFA create “murderers.” This tactic of preying on youths' emotions and using fear to promote their cause is just one effort we have seen in their continued mission of ending animal agriculture and animal protein consumption.

In addition to reaching out to youth exhibitors individually, animal rights activists are also known to protest 4-H and FFA at county and state fairs with livestock present. In fact, one activist associated with DXE has hosted at least three protests at fairs this year. These protests typically include a group of extreme activists who hold signs showing their opposition towards youths' participation in livestock shows along with megaphones to shout misinformation at fairgoers urging them to go vegan.

If you will be involved in a fair or expo this year, we strongly encourage you to prepare for activist protests and disruptions.

Here are some proactive tips:

- All events should have a crisis plan outlining the correct personnel to act in various scenarios – protests, disruptions or even natural disasters or accidents.
- Organizers should consult local law enforcement about how to handle activist activity at fairs and other livestock events.
- Monitor online conversation to see if you may be a target. Protests are frequently organized on social media through event pages or websites.
- Keep an eye out for suspicious activities: people carrying signs or other protest materials, someone taking an excessive number of photos and videos, acting as if they are going live on social media, or individuals asking very direct questions. Youth should report any concerns immediately to fair management and law enforcement.
- Avoid confrontation. Keep in mind they are likely livestreaming or recording the interaction and they want to record you getting upset.
- If you're an adult, ask your child if they have had any interactions that have seemed odd and educate youth on the importance of social media privacy and the risks that are associated with speaking with strangers online.
- Some activists have been focusing on animal transport, so be aware of the potential for activist activity as you are taking your animals to and from the show.

Don't be Alarmed, Be Prepared.

While the threat of activist activity can seem daunting, do not let their outlandish tactics stop you from enjoying fair and expo livestock shows this summer. You should prepare and be ready for the worst, but always expect and hope for the best. For many, local state and county fairs are their only opportunity to see livestock in person, which presents an opportunity for the animal agriculture community to engage with others who are not as familiar with how food is raised. Take the time to speak with fairgoers that are genuinely curious to hear more about your animals, farm life, etc. Share your experiences and the

values behind them. Make their experience a positive one, and hopefully they will leave with a better understanding of modern animal agriculture and will return next year to learn more!

Furthermore, brush up on talking points and animal welfare guidelines so you're ready to share how you care for livestock. You could also consider working with fair and expo leadership to display educational signs around the facilities which may help spur conversations. Another best practice is to establish an animal welfare policy for your farm or club and make sure all exhibitors are committed to animal care.

For more resources on fair and expo security and how to engage with consumers, visit animalagalliance.org.