

## Lincoln/East Adams County Weekly 4-H Article

By Randy Williams, Lincoln/East Adams 4-H Program Coordinator



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### Beef Cattle Showmanship (Part II)

#### Rinsing Your Calf and Working Hair

One of the biggest differences that I have witnessed as a beef cattle judge is observing show cattle that have had their hair “worked” and those that have not. Working hair on a daily basis 2-3 months prior to the first show has an amazing impact on the appearance of your calf. These cattle have a fresher and healthier look to them. This is especially true with cattle that are just coming off a long cold winter where they are beginning to shed their hair. Washing once a week and rinsing daily will promote this natural shedding process and enhance the growth of new hair. The use of a show conditioner (*Show Sheen\** or *Sullivan’s Revive\**) can also be used to enable the hair to stay soft and to promote a healthier hide on your calf and reduce the appearance of dead flaky skin.

The complete process involves getting your calf in the grooming chute, rinsing, applying hair conditioner, grooming with a scotch comb and blowing them out before returning to the stall.

#### Using the Show Stick

First and foremost, it is extremely important to have a “quality” show stick and very much worth the investment (do now take short-cuts here). By this I mean a show stick that is made of the right material (usually aluminum) and the appropriate length. This will enable you to reach the back feet of your calf without losing control of the head thus losing their attention. DO NOT use show sticks where the length is adjustable or allowed to collapse. Unfortunately, I have seen them collapse in the show ring rendering them useless to the showman.

#### There are four basic uses for the show-stick:

Assist in placing the feet.

Calm the animal.

Control the animal.

Keep the top line level.

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## Setting up your calf –

Switch the lead strap from the right hand to your left hand quickly and smoothly. At the same time switch the show stick from the left hand to your right hand. Slowly scratch the calf's belly or chest a couple of times to help calm them. It is very difficult to set up the feet of your calf unless they are calm, standing still, and YOU have their attention.

### Set the calf's feet in the appropriate position.

**Remember:** You have two tools in your hands to set the feet. One is the halter, the other is your show stick. Set the rear feet first if necessary. If you want a rear foot to be moved back, push back on the halter and press (do not jab) the soft tissue of the foot with your show-stick.

If you want a rear foot to move forward, pull forward on the halter and apply pressure with your show stick under the dew claw (Figure 1).

Remember it is easier for the animal to put a foot back than forward. When the rear feet are too close together, apply pressure to the inside of the pastern just above the hoof. This should encourage them to stand wider.

Front feet can be moved by using your boot or show stick to apply pressure in the previously mentioned areas while pushing or pulling with the halter in the desired direction you want the foot to move. Younger (because of shorter legs), less experienced showmen will be safer if they use the show stick.

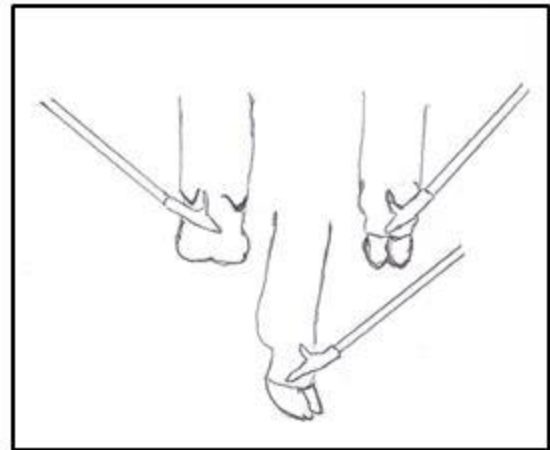


Figure 1: Proper placement of the show stick at the foot.

Placement of the feet depends on what view is provided to the judge and what makes the animal **look its best**. When cattle are lined up side by side, in a straight line, some showmen prefer the feet should be set at all four corners under the animal. (NOTE: Many showmen prefer to not square the feet up at this view, but rather stagger them similar to the profile view, especially if your calf is positioned at either end of the line of cattle). At this view, the judge is looking at the rear and front of the animal.



**Figure 2: Set up when viewed on the profile.**

When the cattle are lined up on the profile (head to tail), the feet should be set as if a professional photographer is taking a picture. The rear feet should be staggered so that the far-side foot is slightly in front of the foot closest to the judge. Usually a heel to toe relationship works best (**Figure 2**).

That means the heel of one foot is parallel with the toe of the other foot. The front feet should be set square or staggered less than the rear feet. The toe of the front foot away from the judge should be set back half the width of the hoof on the judge's side. By setting the feet in this manner, you provide the judge with a perception of depth and thickness of your calf (especially important with breeding cattle). It also makes it easier to level the top line and to make most cattle look more level at the hip.

### **The show stick can also be used to correct a top line.**

When using the show stick to correct a top line apply pressure at the navel or flank with the hook of the show stick if the top is weak and needs to be raised.

If the hip is steep and the loin is high, apply pressure to this area to bring it down; continue to scratch the calf's belly to keep it calm.

The show stick may also be used to help control your calf while walking. While showing, always keep the point of the show-stick down for safety reasons. While walking, the show stick is in your left hand at the handle or about one-third of the way down. This will allow use of the show stick as an additional control tool if needed. If the animal is moving too fast simply use the portion of the stick between your left hand and the tip for tapping the nose. Never hit or beat, merely tap on the nose for control purposes.

***While showing, always keep the point of the show stick down for safety and professional appearance.***

Reference cited: Beef Showmanship Guide-The Judging Connection.com  
[http://www.thejudgingconnection.com/pdfs/Beef\\_Showmanship\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.thejudgingconnection.com/pdfs/Beef_Showmanship_Guide.pdf)  
Next week we will talk about **"Show day"**

### **Randy Williams**

Lincoln/Adams 4-H Program Coordinator, Washington State University Extension

Office: (509)725-4171 Ext. 19 fax: (509)725-4104 [randy.williams@wsu.edu](mailto:randy.williams@wsu.edu)

<http://ext100.wsu.edu/lincoln-adams/>