

## A Lesson in Showing Cattle

Showmanship is the one area of exhibiting beef cattle over which you have the most control. In showmanship, you are judged on your ability to control and present your steer or heifer in order to bring out its best characteristics. Advanced planning and hard work are the keys to being a good showperson. Beef cattle showmanship not only generates enthusiasm and competition in the show ring, but also teaches valuable lessons which can be used everyday. These lessons include responsibility, perseverance, learning about hard work and determination to reach a goal, and sportsmanship.

### *Start early*

Success in beef cattle showmanship starts at home and begins with halter breaking your animal. Properly put a rope halter on the calf and allow the lead rope to drag around on the ground for two to three days. This makes your animal aware of the halter. Next, tie the animal for a half hour, working up to two to three hours a day. During this time brush your animal and keep it calm. In time, your animal will respond to your hand movements with a halter and showstick. Training your animal to walk, stop, and set up easily will take time and patience. First, try to lead it to and from water and feed. Then begin leading the animal around the barnyard. Practice in several short segments, not long drawn out sessions. After the animal is used to being walked and set up, practice having another person move close to and handle the animal with you at the halter. This will allow it to remain calm under a judge's close inspection.

### *Using The Halter*

The halter should be properly placed on the animal's head with the lead strap on its left side. The halter cross strap which crosses over the muzzle or nose of the animal should be two to three inches from the eye. Rope halters and show halters can be adjusted for proper fit. Do not have the halter so big that the nose cross piece is down by the mouth.

### *When leading...*

- you should be on the calf's left side with the halter in your right hand.
- your hand should be six to 12 inches from the animal's head. With show halters, this is usually at the junction of the chain and leather strap.
- you should firmly grab over the strap so your thumb is closest to you, not under the strap. Your wrist is stronger this way, and gives you more control over the animal.
- the strap length should be long enough for control, but not long enough to touch the ground. If the strap of the show halter can touch the ground you or the calf might step on it and it becomes awkward to switch hands. If the strap is long, holding the extra length in your left hand is preferred. If the calf is spooked, you will have two hands on the strap.
- do not wrap the halter strap around your hand or fingers as this is harder to let go if you need to, in order to prevent injury.

### *Using the showstick*

There are five basic uses for the showstick.

- to assist in placing the feet
- calm the animal
- control the animal
- keep the top straight
- scotch-driving

### ***When setting up your calf...***

- smoothly switch the lead strap from your right hand to your left hand.
- at the same time, switch your showstick from your left hand to your right hand.
- slowly scratch your calf's belly a couple of times to help calm your animal.
- set the 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 showstick. If you want a rear foot to be moved back, push backward on the halter and press (do not jab) the soft tissue where the hoof is split with your showstick (Figure 9.09 A.). If you want a rear foot to move forward, pull forward on the halter and apply pressure with your showstick under the dew claw (Figure 9.09 B.).

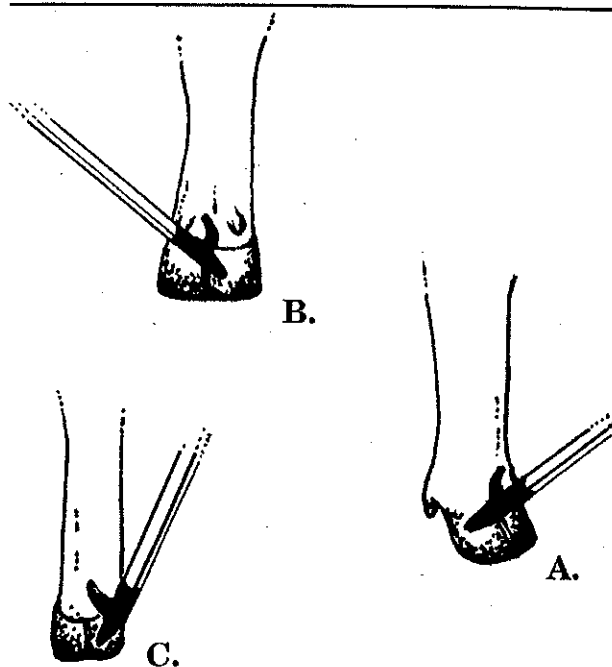
Remember it is easier for the animal to put a foot back than forward. When the rear feet are too close together apply pressure to the inside of a leg just above the hoof (Figure 9.09 C.) and they should stand wider. Front feet can be moved by using your boot or showstick to apply pressure in the previously mentioned areas while pushing or pulling with the halter in the desired direction you want the foot to move. Younger, less experienced showpersons will be safer if they use the showstick. Placement of the feet depends on what view you are providing to the judge and what makes the animal look the best.

- set the feet at all four corners under the animal bearing their full share of the animal's weight, when the cattle are lined up side by side, in a straight line (Figure 9.10a). At this view, the judge is looking at the rear and front of the animal.

---

### ***Proper use of the showstick in placement of the feet***

---

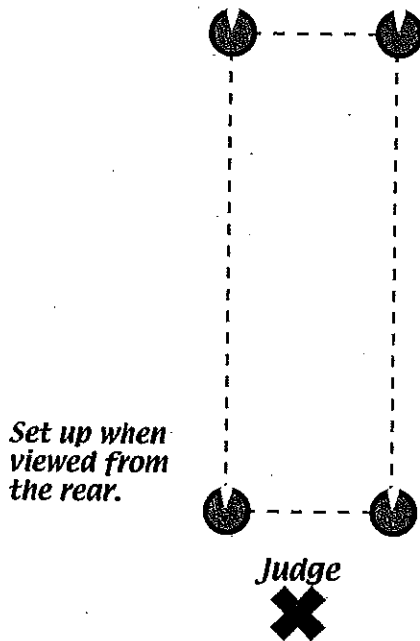


(Figure 9.09)

- set the feet as if a professional photographer is taking a picture when the cattle are lined up on the profile. The rear feet should be staggered so the far side foot is slightly in front of the foot closest to the judge. Usually, a heel to toe relationship works the best (Figure 9.10b). 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 distance of the hoof on the judges side. By setting the feet in this manner, you provide the judge a sense or perception of depth and thickness. It also makes it easier to correct a topline and rump structure.

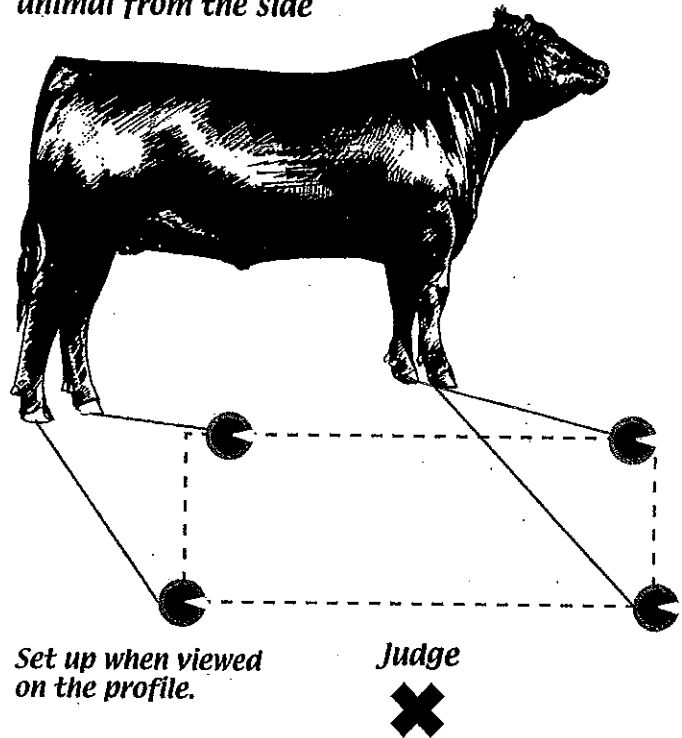
## Setting up your beef animal for judging

*Correct feet placement when judge is viewing animal from behind*



(Figure 9.10a)

*Correct feet placement when judge is viewing animal from the side*



(Figure 9.10b)

### *When using the showstick to correct a topline...*

- simply apply pressure at the naval or flank with the hook of the showstick if the top is weak and needs to be raised.
- if the rump is steep and the loin is high, apply pressure to the loin area to bring it down. Then continue to scratch the animal's belly to keep it calm.

### *While using the showstick to control your calf...*

- always keep the point of the showstick down, for safety reasons.
- the showstick is in your left hand at the handle or about one-third of the way down when walking. This will allow you to use the showstick 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 top of the stick for tapping the nose. Never hit or beat, merely tap on the nose.

### *While using the showstick to scotch-drive your calf...*

(Scotch-driving is when your calf will not lead or walk and no one is around to help you get started. *Not recommended while in the showing.*)

- simply push forward on the halter with your right hand and tap the animal with the showstick on its side or rump. This will make the animal think someone is behind it and it should start to walk.

### ***Using the scotch comb***

The scotch comb should be carried in your back pocket, or in a scotch comb sheath (if you do not have back pockets) with the teeth toward you. This is for safety and courtesy reasons as you would not want someone else to get injured due to your equipment. The scotch comb is to fix and groom the hair which may become messed up from the judge or another person handling your calf or another animal bumping into your animal. The corner of the scotch comb may also be used to apply pressure to the loin or top to bring the topline straight, like the showstick.

### ***At showtime***

Prior to the show, walk over the show ring to find any high and low spots of the show ring surface. This will help you avoid these areas and assist you in setting up your calf going uphill and not in a hole.

Dress neatly and look like a livestock person. Leather boots should be worn for safety and appearance reasons. If the calf steps on your foot, the calf's foot will slip off a leather boot much easier than a tennis shoe, and your foot will not hurt as much. Wear nice jeans or slacks. Faded jeans look less professional and should not be worn.

Wear a nice button-down or polo shirt which is pleasing to the eye. No camouflage shirts or T-shirts should be worn. Also, tuck your shirt into your pants and wear a belt for neatness. Leave hats back at the grooming area. Hats may distract the judge's concentration. Your planning and neat appearance will help you to gain success.

### ***When entering the show ring...***

- be prompt and have the proper equipment. Be sure to have the proper exhibitor number, showstick, and scotch comb. It is helpful, if you are not in the first class, to watch a class or two so you will know where to line up and how the classes will move through the show ring.
- cattle are lined up side by side to start a class. When pulling into line, look where you will be and head into that position. Do not simply follow the person in front of you as this usually ends up in an "S" configuration, and you can end up brushing against the calf which was in front of you as you pull into the line.
- check your animal a few feet before you reach your destination to slow the animal down when pulling into line. To check your animal, simply lift up slightly on the halter so the animal knows you are about to stop.
- line up where the ring person indicates. If you are third or fourth in the ring, line up your calf even with the other animals and leave three or four feet on both sides of your animal. This allows ample room for you and others to set up the calves.
- get your calf set up as discussed earlier with the head held high. Be alert, keep a close eye on your calf, keep the feet set square, and know where the judge is located. If your calf is not set square and the judge is nearby, set your calf up. Most judges will wait for you, and you want to present your calf the best you can. Always allow the judge to see the view he or she is seeking. Try not to be between the judge and the animal.

### *When walking cattle...*

- move as the judge or ring person instructs, either left or right. Most likely, you will pull the cattle up to the rail and turn to your left, three-fourths of a circle, and walk right behind the other cattle in the side by side line.
- help out the exhibitor in front of you if they are having trouble. Tap the animal's rump with the showstick or preferably put your showstick in your right hand and twist the tail of the calf in front of you with your left hand. Being courteous to others is a must.
- let the animal walk out freely.
- stop in a straight line head to tail (profile).
- remember to check your calf and then stop by lifting the head. Allow four to six feet between your calf and the calf in front of you. This will allow the judge space to move freely around the cattle and help to prevent your calf from mounting the other calf.
- position the feet as discussed earlier for the profile and keep the topline straight with the calf's head up.
- locate the judge and calmly wait. Do not saw your animal in half with rapid stick movement while waiting for the judge. Use slow deliberate strokes with the showstick. The judge may handle the cattle and ask you a few questions. Do not make noises or rattle the chain of the halter. As the judge moves around your animal, move a half step back to allow the judge the full view he or she seeks. Be prepared to answer questions about your animal: weight, birth date, sire, dam, pregnancy status of your heifer, feeding program, parts of the animal, yield grade, quality grade, and where retail cuts of meat come from.
- use the scotch comb to fix the hair which has been messed up.

### *If your animal has moved and the judge has gone on to the next animal...*

- pull your animal out in a clockwise circle in the ring and move the animal back into line. Set the animal up first and then fix the hair. It is more important to have the animal set correctly and looking its best first as the hair may be minor compared to how the animal is standing.
- look for a sign or motion to be pulled into a line for the placing. This may be another profile line or side by side. As the judge pulls the cattle from the profile line, empty spaces will occur. If two or more spaces between cattle become empty, move forward in the line. Remember your spacing and set your calf up at its best. By moving forward and filling the empty spaces, you help the judge make it easier to make comparisons. Once pulled into a side by side line, you are nearing the end of the class but be aware the class is not over. Pull into the side by side line as discussed earlier, stay alert and set the animal up.

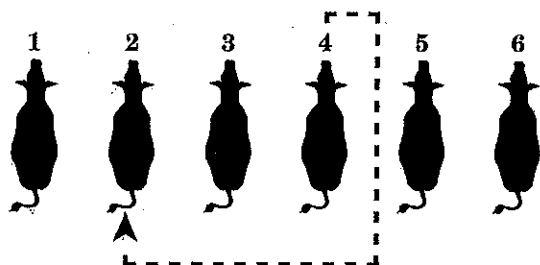
Sometimes positions may be switched. Shown are some situations that may occur (Figure 9.11). Please note you pass back through the same hole that you left and to the proper position. If you are positioned up to a rail, do not turn around in a line. Back your animal out by pushing back on the halter with your left hand and applying pressure with your right hand at the point of the shoulder. Then pull into the line at the instructed position. When the judge starts his reasons, the class is over, but your job is not. You should continue to work hard and display good sportsmanship. Leave the ring in an orderly manner as instructed by the ringperson and pick up your awards.

---

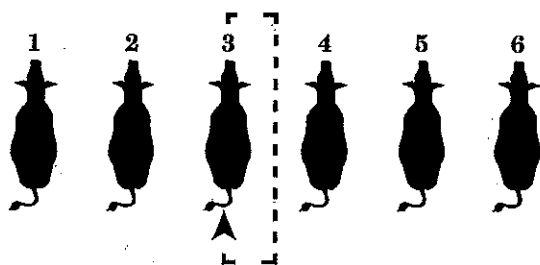
### Switching positions

---

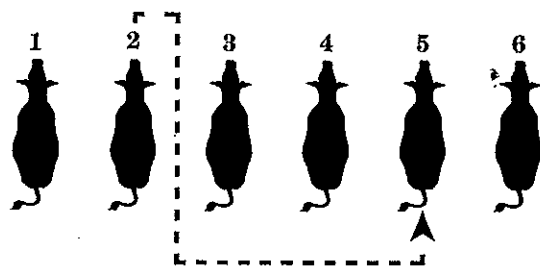
1. How to switch from position 4 to position 2.



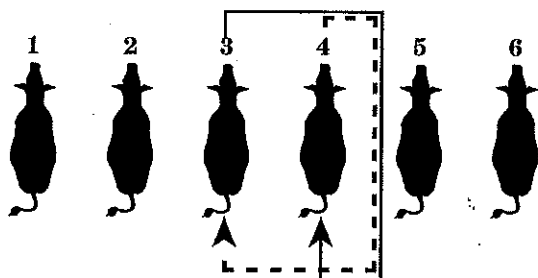
2. How to reset in the same position using position 3.



3. How to switch from position 2 to position 5.



4. How to switch positions 3 and 4. Position 4 would move out first.



(Figure 9.11)

### Exhibitor Courtesy and Sportsmanship

Remember to keep straight lines so the judge can compare all the animals. If you are blocking the view of another animal and have space, move so the judge can see all the animals. However, if you are the one hidden, it is your responsibility to be where your animal can be seen. Do not rely on the other exhibitor as he or she may not have room to move. Pull back in line even at the end if this is where space is available on the profile.

Avoid bumping, crowding, or hitting other animals. If your animal becomes nervous or unruly, act like a professional. Be patient, remain calm, and never get discouraged or lose your temper. Finally, congratulate the class winners and those who stood ahead of you. Remember, this is a learning experience. Leave the ring with your head held high, knowing you have given this project your best effort. Learn from your mistakes, watch other showpersons and improve your skills for the next show.

## Final Preparation Before the Show

Here are some tips on things to do to make your trip to the show ring or county fair a more enjoyable experience:

- If you have a feeder calf project, make sure you wean your calf three to four weeks before the fair if it is still nursing the cow.
- Two weeks before the show, start feeding and watering your animal with the same buckets you will use at the fair. The first time it is used, place the pan in the animal's creep feeder. After three or four feedings, feed with the pan on the ground where the animal is tied.
- Teach the animal to drink from a bucket. Take away all water sources, except the bucket. Put a fresh bucket of water in the pen after each feeding.

The water your animal is used to may taste different than what is at the fair because of changes in mineral content. Your animal may refuse to drink water away from home. This can affect how your animal will look in the show ring. To prevent a problem, add flavoring to your water to cover up the natural taste. For example, about two weeks before the show, begin adding molasses or brown sugar (about one teaspoon per gallon) to the water. Your animal will get used to this flavor. This can be used while you are at the show.

- Anticipate changes. Your animal will be affected by the changes in its environment and water between home and the fairgrounds.

- Moderate the stress from the change in the environment by playing a radio near your calf for a week before you go to the fair. Transport your calf early in the morning or late in the afternoon to avoid the extreme summer heat.
- Before you leave for the show or fair, check your show equipment and supplies and pack them in a show box. Make a list of what you have. This will help you keep track of your equipment.
- Make sure you have the correct health papers required by the officials of the show.

### *At the fair or show*

- Find your stall quickly and bed it with straw to protect your animal from the hard surface. (If you are planning to use an alternative bedding check with the Beef Department Superintendent. Some fair boards have regulations concerning bedding other than straw). Plan to take two bales of straw per animal. This will keep your animal's area well bedded and clean at all times.
- Tie the animal in the stall, give it some hay and a small amount of water. Allow it to rest for several hours before feeding.
- Use the same routine at the fair as you do at home. Feed at the same time, using fresh feed each time. After 30 minutes, remove any feed that the animal has not eaten. Remember, your animal will usually only eat half as much at the fair as it does at home.





## Showing Cattle

The purpose of showmanship is to present an animal in a manner that will develop the most favorable impression on the judge. Showing beef steers and heifers properly is an important part of your beef project and an extremely rewarding experience. Beef cattle showmanship not only generates enthusiasm and competition within the showing, but also teaches other valuable lessons that can be applied to everyday life. These lessons include accepting responsibility, winning graciously, losing with dignity, and learning the amount of work and determination it takes to become a winner.

## Where To Start

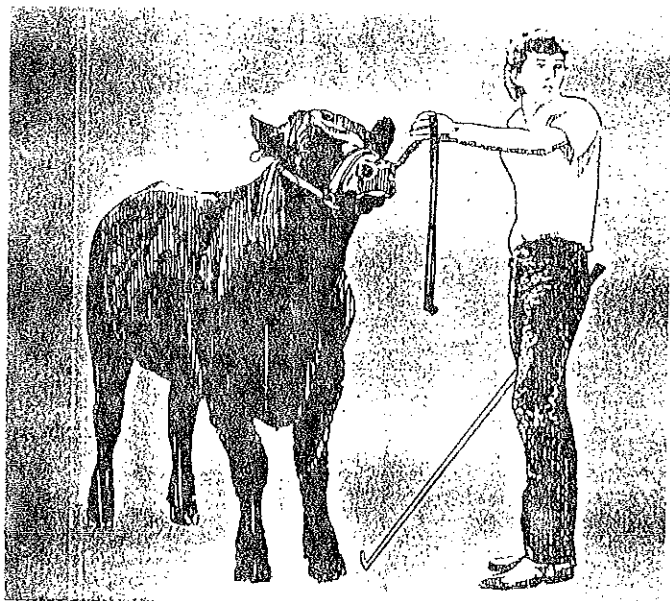
Success in showmanship begins at home. Good showmanship isn't difficult, but it does take patience and effort. It takes time to halter break your animal so that it is responsive to your hand movements on the show halter, or, to a showstick. Your heifer or steer should be trained to walk, stop and be set up easily and quickly when commanded. Make sure your animal is well-accustomed to being handled with both a show halter and a showstick prior to entering the ring. In addition, your animal should also be accustomed to handling by another person. The judge will then be able to perform a close inspection without interruption or fear of injury. In preparing for a show, practice often with your animal in several short periods rather than just a few long, drawn-out practice sessions.

## Using The Halter

Once your animal has been halter broken, it should be taught to stop and lead with its head up in a natural and attentive position. Rope halters may be used until approximately two weeks before a show. At that time a show halter should be substituted frequently.

When leading, hold the halter strap in your right hand, 6 to 12 inches away from the animal's head (usually at the junction of the chain and leather portion of the show strap). Most animals will not lead well or behave if the halter is held closer. Since an animal normally moves its head before any other portion of the body, a firm hold on the halter will give you better control and often prevent any wayward foot movement.

When leading, any extra strap may be folded and held within the right hand, or the extra length may be held in the left hand. The latter method is preferred because you can better control a spooked animal when you have two hands on the strap. Do not, however, invite injury by wrapping the halter strap around your fingers or hand. Many participants shorten the leather strap so it needs no folding and hangs free.



## Using The Showstick

The showstick is used to:

- assist in placing the feet
- keep the topline straight
- calm the animal
- control the animal

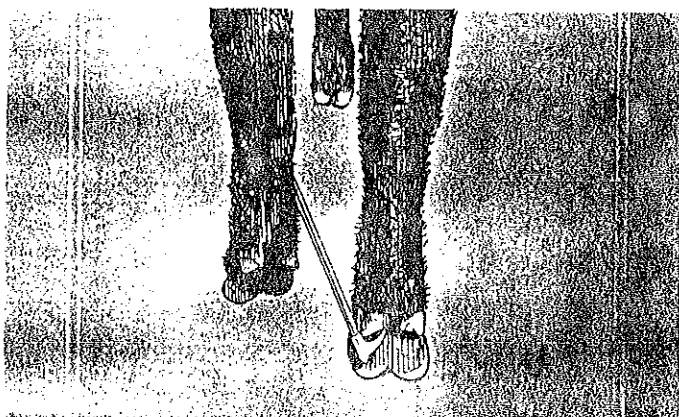
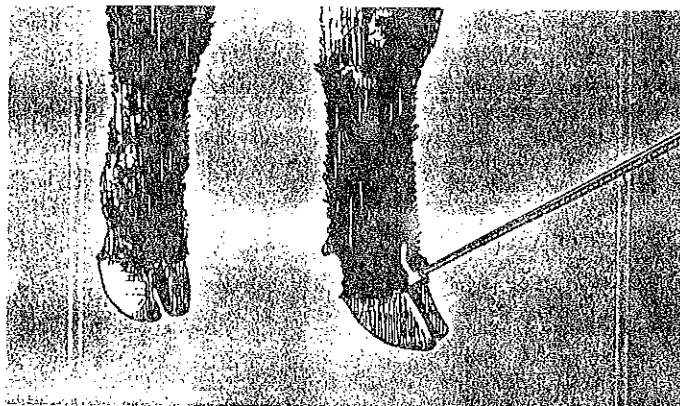
When setting up, switch the lead strap to your left hand, and the showstick to your right. If a hind foot is to be moved backward, pull backward on the halter and simultaneously apply pressure with your showstick to the soft tissue where the hoof is split; but, avoid jabbing this tender spot. When the hind foot is to be moved forward, pull forward on the halter and apply pressure with the showstick under the dew claw. When the hind feet are too close together, apply pressure with the showstick to the inside of the leg just above the hoof.

Front feet may be repositioned using either a showstick or boots. Younger, inexperienced, showmen will be safer using a showstick. While pulling or pushing on the halter, simultaneously apply pressure to the dew claw to move the hoof forward or to the split of the hoof to move it backward or sideways. Through practice, you will become very proficient at setting up your animal quickly, quietly, and safely.

The showstick will also help keep the animal's topline straight. Simply apply pressure to the underline or place the hook of the stick inside the rear flank and apply slight pressure.

When training your animal, tie its head to a high rail or post. Practice setting up by using your showstick and occasionally stroking the animal's underline as you place the hooves. This calms your animal and gains acceptance of your showstick.

Finally, the showstick will help to keep your animal from moving too rapidly while being led. When leading, hold the showstick in the left hand about one-third of the way down from the butt end. This will permit good control of the showstick and allow you to use the butt end of the showstick for tapping the nose, when needed.



## In The Showring

### Entering and Setting Up

After your animal is thoroughly groomed and outfitted, prepare to enter the showring. Be prompt, alert, neatly dressed, but not overdressed. Dirty clothes, sneakers, or lack of personal cleanliness will detract from the impression you and your animal make on the judge. Be certain you have your exhibitor number, showstick, and a Scotch or black rubber comb for re-grooming your animal in the ring. Also, you must know the birthdate and weight of your animal.

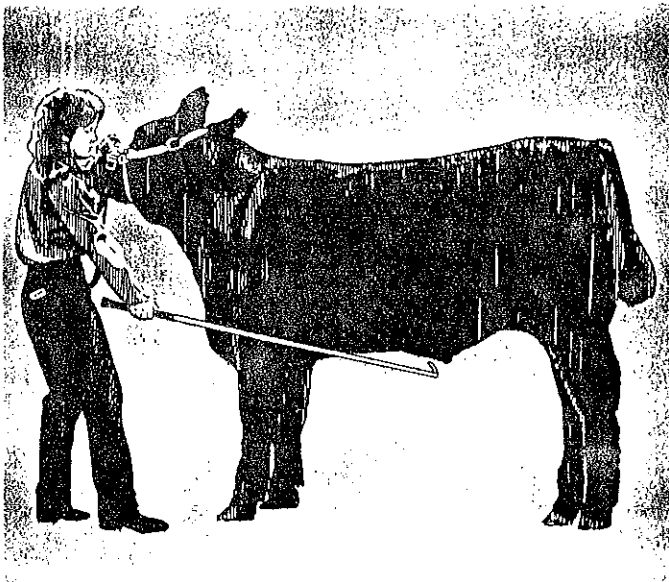
Lead your animal into line and set it up as quickly as possible. Generally, cattle will be lined up side by side to start a class. When pulling into line or stopping, always try to leave three or four feet on both sides of your animal. In this way you have enough room to set up and others will have ample room for movement. Avoid setting up in a low spot or with the front feet in a hole; try to put the front feet on higher ground. Also, leave at least five feet between your animal's head and the edge of the ring. This will allow room for the judge to move in front of the row. Keep yourself in a position to watch both your animal and the judge. Winning beef showmen always keep their animal's legs placed correctly, the head up and the back level.

When lining up head to tail, allow four to six feet between animals. If the animal in front is reluctant to move, tap it gently on the rump with the showstick or twist the tail to help get it started. Let your animal walk freely. Tap your animal on the nose with the showstick if walking too fast.

Train your animal to stop by lifting its head. Normally, the result will be placement of the animal's front feet squarely under each corner of the body. Position the front feet first, if needed; then proceed with the hind feet. Due to the manner in which the animal walks, one hind foot is likely to be placed incorrectly and in need of re-positioning.

Set the hind legs making sure that each leg is placed squarely under each corner of the body. Keep the animal's back level and its head up. Slowly stroke the animal's underline with the hook of the showstick to calm it and keep the top level. Do not "saw" the animal by pushing the stick back and forth rapidly. If the animal is high in the loin apply pressure to the loin with a fingernail or the hook of the showstick to level out the top. When leading off, switch the lead strap back to the right hand and the showstick to the left hand.

Use patience when your animal is contrary and difficult to set up. Many times, especially when being viewed from the side, it is best to pull out of line, make a clockwise turn, and start over.



## During The Class

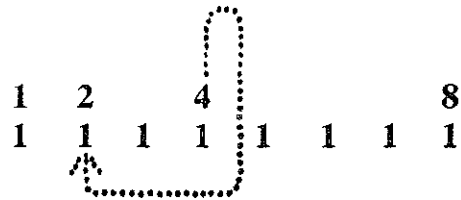
Watch the judge and ringman for directions and respond promptly. In showmanship contests, direct most of your attention to the judge for instructions. The judge will expect you to be familiar with the proper way to move your animal from one place to another. The following illustrations demonstrate the most common procedure in a class of eight animals.

Normally, cattle are turned to the right or in a clockwise manner. The exceptions are small classes or showrings. Some judges prefer that you back an animal out of line when moving to a different position. This speeds up the show. When the ring is small and the line is near the rail, you have no choice. Simply back out of line and go to the indicated position.

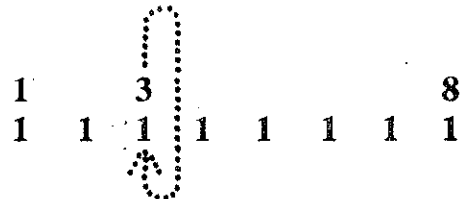
By being very alert as to when and where the judge wants you to stop, you will be able to anticipate how you can best position your animal. Again, leave three or four feet on each side when pulling into line or four to six feet in front when lining up head to tail. Stay in line with the other animals.

Do not look only at the judge. The old saying "keep one eye on the judge and one eye on the animal" is very appropriate. Most important, see that your animal is always set up correctly and presented to show its advantages.

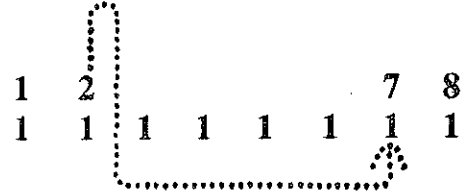
### 1. How To Switch From Position 4 To Position 2



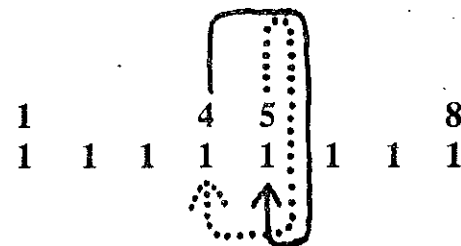
### 2. How To Reset Up In The Same Position Using Position 3



### 3. How To Go From Position 2 To Position 7



### 4. How To Switch Positions 4 And 5 (No. 5 Would Move Out First)



## Close Inspection

When the judge is viewing your animal, keep its head up, its top level, and alert. Do not make noises or rattle the chain on the halter. Stand erect but in a comfortable position so that you can check leg placement and move about freely. When the judge is not viewing your animal, let it relax but not go to sleep. As the judge moves around your animal, move a half step to allow the view he seeks. Never step out in front of your animal. When a judge handles your steer or heifer, comb the hair back into place after the judge steps back. Normally, judges will not handle heifers except in showmanship contests.

## Showring Courtesy

When animals are lined up head to tail, or side to side, the judge is comparing your animal to the rest of the class. If your animal is out of line and covering the view of another animal, the judge cannot make a fair comparison and you are not practicing showring courtesy. Avoid bumping, crowding or striking another exhibitor's animal. Also, do your part to keep the line straight and allow ample space between animals. Again, help your fellow exhibitor if his/her

animal is reluctant to move. If your animal becomes nervous in the showing, work quietly and patiently with it and remain calm. Do not get discouraged or lose your temper.

When the judge has announced the final placings, his reasons, and the awards are distributed, leave the ring in an orderly manner following the instructions of the ringman.

## Sportsmanship

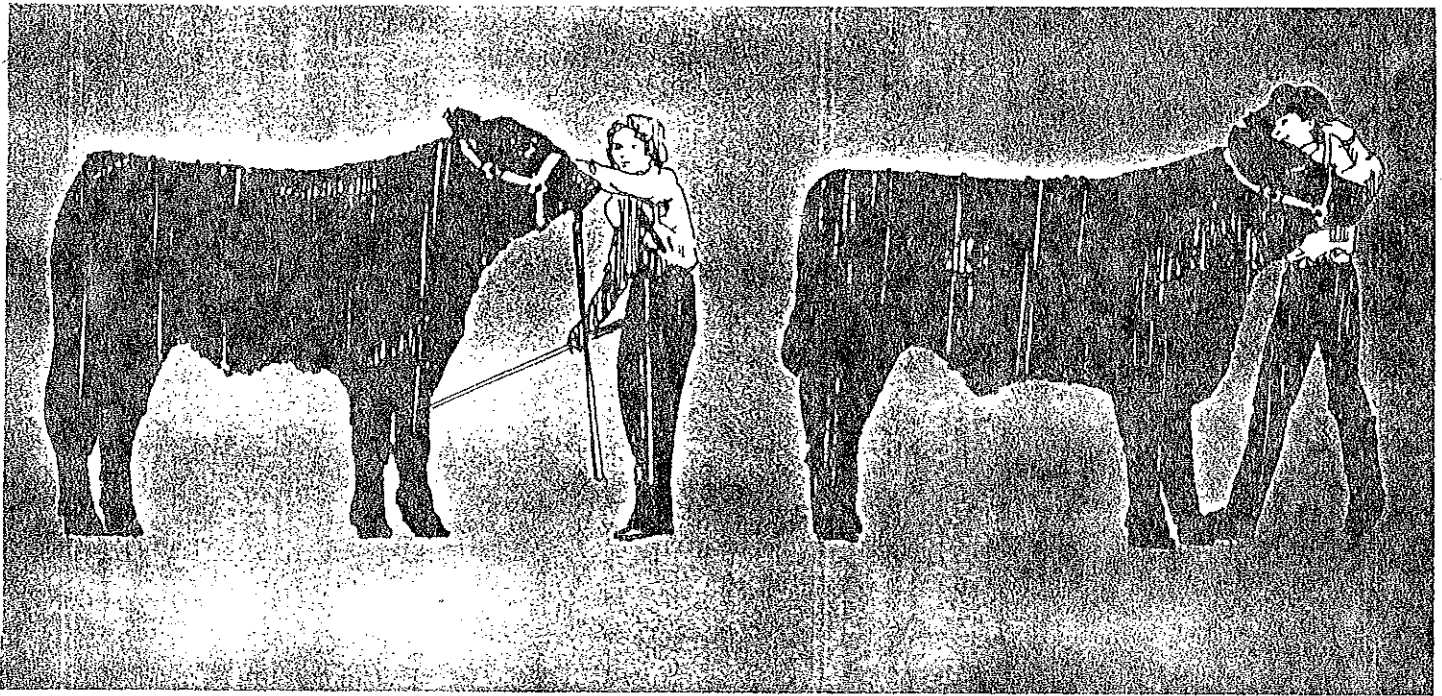
Congratulate the winners and accept congratulations graciously. Do not become disappointed if you do not win or rank as high as you think you deserved. But remember, there are others in the same class that feel they earned and deserved the honor. Apply what you've learned and be better prepared for your next showing.

Prepared By:

Raymond W. Harvey, Professor, Animal Science, in charge of Purebred Beef Cattle, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, N.C.

And

Pete Sweeney, Manager, Purebred Beef Cattle, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan



Special appreciation is expressed to Wrangler' Jeans, for the research, copywriting, artwork and printing required to bring you "Beef Showmanship."

