



4-H Bucket Calf Project

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service • Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

David Pace – Oklahoma State University
Assistant Extension Livestock Specialist, 4-H and Youth

The 4-H Bucket Calf Project is designed to introduce youth 7-12 years-old to beef and Dairy 4-H projects. By allowing younger children the experience of working with a smaller, less intimidating size of animal, they become comfortable with beef and dairy cattle as they grow. This is designed to be a short-term project with calves purchased in May and finalized with showing at the local county fair.

A bucket calf is an orphan or newborn calf purchased when they are one to ten days old. The calves may be male or female, beef or dairy. The calves are started on a bottle (or bucket) and nipple.

Calves should be purchased between May 1 and May 30 of the current year. Counties can tag the calves at the end of May or the first of June to verify ownership. This may be done at a central location or tags may be given to club project leaders, who tag the calves for participants.

Only one bucket calf per 4-H member may be shown at the county fair although participants may own two or more calves. Calves shown in the bucket calf class are ineligible to be shown in any other class. Health requirements should be set by local fair boards and listed in the fair book.

Bucket calf classes are judged by conference method (personal interviews). The quality of the calf is not a consideration. The calf should be washed and dried and may be trimmed (although this will not affect the judging). No show sticks. Rope halters are allowed.

Each participant presents his or her calf to the judge individually. The judge interviews the contestant to determine what the child has learned about caring for and raising the calf. Questions regarding purchase, management, housing, health, feeding, and future plans are considered appropriate and may be expanded for older members.

Classes should be set according to the ages of the participants. Example: 7-8, 9-10, 11-12.

For 4-H members the Danish Ribbon System (color groups) should be used. The judge will place exhibitors in the blue, red, or white ribbon group. The decision of the judge will be final. Any complaints or disagreements should be put in writing and addressed to the fair board.

Cloverbuds or pre-4-H members (7 and 8 year-olds) will all receive participation awards.

Showing at the county fair completes the Bucket Calf Project. Members may keep the calf for a breeding heifer or steer project or may sell the calf at a sale barn or by private treaty.

Bucket Calf Costume Class

An optional costume class is also a fun way for participants to exhibit their project. Both the 4-Her and calf are dressed in a costume for this class. Each pair should be dressed related to a theme that promotes beef or dairy (depending on the calf they are showing). Or the county may set the theme each year.

The show announcer reads a script prepared by the contestant's family while the pair circles the ring. Creativity and getting a message across are two important criteria for this event. The Danish system is an appropriate method of awards for this experience.

Common Questions

How much does a newborn to week old calf cost?

Prices vary depending on demand, health, breed, and location. Typically dairy breeds are more available and therefore less expensive. Prices will vary from \$50 all the way up to \$500 in extreme situations. An average price should be \$150 unless there are other price factors. A good calf at a sale barn in May could cost \$300.

Where do I get a newborn calf?

Calves may be purchased off the farm from dairy or beef producers. Also, livestock auctions sell newborn to week old calves. Contact your Extension Educator for more ideas.

What is the most important thing to know when buying a calf?

Make sure the calf has had colostrum after being born. Colostrum is the first milk produced by cows at calving time. It is essential to the well being of the newborn calf because colostrum contains antibodies, which are things that prevent certain diseases. Unless the calf receives colostrum within the first few hours after being born, the calf will likely become sick and may die. Get more information in 4-H publication No. 136 [Keeping Your Calf Healthy](#).

What do I feed and how do I feed it?

You will start your calf on milk replacer. And you will feed it to the calf in a bottle (or bucket) with a nipple designed just for calves. Most farm supply stores will carry these supplies

and will be happy to help you get started with your project. Read more about feeding in 4-H publication No. 135 [Feeding a Bucket Calf](#).

How much space does a calf require?

Your calf will require shelter and a pen for protection from the weather and predators (dogs). A plywood hut (3 sheets of plywood) and a 16 x 8 foot pen are sufficient for 2 bucket calves. See the 4-H publication No. 137 [Bucket Calf Housing](#).

What other activities are involved?

Record keeping and awards. Bucket calf exhibitors are encouraged to fill out a [Bucket Calf Record](#) (Lit No. 140). Four-H members are recognized at the annual county achievement program for record books. Contact your local leader for more information on records and awards.

Applying the Experiential Learning Process

The 4-H program uses the experiential learning process as the primary format for educating youth audiences. Experiential learning takes place when a person is involved in an activity, looks back at it critically, determines what was useful or important to remember, and uses this information to perform another activity.

Because of their love for animals, 4-H'ers in the livestock projects are especially motivated to "learn by doing." The experiential process requires the leader or parent to have a clear objective for an activity that relates to life skill development. Activities should be carefully planned to most effectively reach those learning objectives. Here are the key steps in this process:

- The participant(s) **experience** the activity. Begin with a concrete experience. This can be an individual activity or a group experience, but it involves "doing something".

- Participant(s) **share** the experience by describing what happened. Get the participant(s) to talk about the experience. Share reactions and observations. Let the group talk freely. Acknowledge ideas. Allow time to share responses. Encourage group members to answer questions posed by others. Avoid having the leader answer all the questions.
- The participant(s) **process** the experience to identify common themes. Discuss how themes, problems, and issues are brought out by the activity. Talk about specific problems and issues that the group discovers from the experience or recalls from personal experiences.
- Have the participant(s) **generalize** from the experience to form principles or guidelines that can be used in real-life situations (e.g., life skills). Find general trends in the experience. Draw out and identify the principles that are important - that apply to "real life," not just the activity. This focuses on the key messages. Identify situations where the principles apply.
- Ask the participant(s) to **apply** what was learned to another situation. Concentrate on how the new learning can be applied to everyday situations. Discuss how issues raised by this activity can be useful in the future. Describe how more effective behaviors can grow out of what is learned.

Providing an experience alone does not create "**experiential learning**." The activity comes first. The learning comes from the thoughts and ideas created as a result of the experience. This is a "learn by doing" or experiential process. Addressing each step in the process assures a plan that will reach a specific goal. The leader's role is to go beyond simply showing or telling how to accomplish a task. The leader's role is to develop activities that allow youth to develop solutions to problems that will in turn increase that youth's life skill development. Simply stated, leaders and parents are teachers, not doers, and they let the youth learn.

Reference

Adapted from the Kansas Dairy Leaders Notebook.

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Samuel E. Curl, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Dean of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. 0402 JS.