

# Livestock Comfort at the Fair

Bernie O'Rourke, Extension Youth Livestock Specialist  
University of Wisconsin—Madison

Hot, Hot, Hot...

This year's fair season seems to have started off not favorable for man or beast, with the high heat and humidity. A hot fair leaves fair exhibitors looking for coolness for both themselves and their fair animals. When temperatures reach above 80 degrees and the relative humidity is above 65 percent, comfort is certainly compromised. This kind of weather can be especially deadly for swine, as they have non-functioning sweat glands. Here are some suggestions to keep your animals cool.

## Signs of heat stress:

Animals under stress will be uncomfortable, much like we are when enduring this heat. General signs of stress are: panting, open mouth breathing, excessive salivation, lack of coordination, trembling, inability to stand, and high rectal temperature. During a heat wave it is difficult for animals to maintain their normal body temperature. Research indicates as the heat and humidity increases during the heat of the day so does the body temperature of animals. If the heat and humidity continue during the evening hours and for many days, the animal can't recover to its normal body temperature.

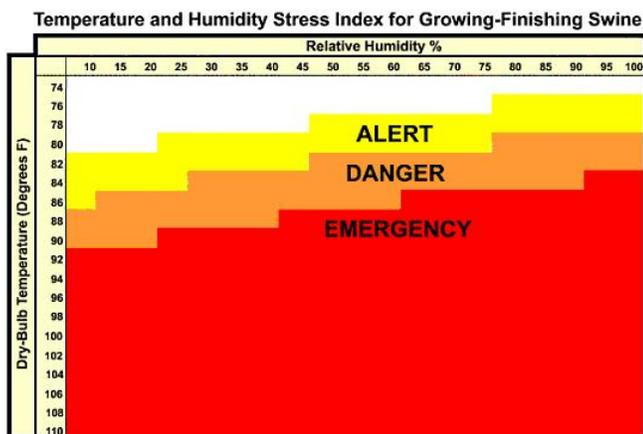


Chart courtesy of Iowa State University

(The stress chart was included for swine as they are the most sensitive to heat due to no sweat glands.)

## Transportation of animals:

Before transportation make sure the animals have been hydrated and sprinkle animals with water. Use wet shavings for bedding, never use straw. Straw acts as an insulator. Transport animals during the coolest part of the day, such as early morning or late evening. Haul as few animals as possible, don't crowd animals in the trailer. In the trailer, unplug ventilation holes. Load and unload promptly. Fairs may need to adjust their schedule of arrival and departure of animals to accommodate the cooler part of the day.

## Barns at the fair:

There should be ample ventilation within the barns at the fair. When heat and humidity can't be lowered, more air movement across people and animals can help remove heat, and lower heat stress. To run the amount of fans that would be needed to create air movement, more electrical use maybe

needed. Thus generators might be needed for supplemental electricity and located away from spectators as they are noisy and distracting. If animals are located on the outside edge of a barn where sunlight shows, use tarps to shade the morning or afternoon light. Make sure it isn't trapping heat, making the situation worse.



## At the fair:

Check in is a situation where fair staff should consider an alternative time for weighing, ultrasounding, etc. of animals. Facilities should lend themselves to a low stress environment and the process should be quick and effortless. The show also might need to be conducted at an alternative time. Moving the show into the evening hours could be advantageous. Water animals and utilize electrolytes if needed to get animals to drink. Allow access to water at all times, without them making a mess of their pen. Rinse animals to keep cool. It might be easier and less stressful to rinse them in their pen rather than taking them to a wash rack numerous times throughout the day. Early release of animals from the fair may need to be considered. Loadout procedures should be followed as stated earlier. Animal grouping should be another consideration if possible. Don't put as many animals in a pen and leave some distance between tied animals in the barn. Your #1 responsibility at the fair are you and your animals, therefore it is crucial to be there early in the morning till late at night managing them. While the fair is time for fun and friends, these conditions could be life threatening for your animals. Pay attention and have a great fair experience.

## References:

Trucker Quality Assurance, National Pork Board  
Providing Livestock Comfort at the County Fair, Ohio State University Fact Sheet  
Heat Stress, Fairs, and Achievement Days: Animal Considerations, South Dakota State University Extension Fact Sheet

Reviewed by: David Kammel, UW Madison Biological Systems Engineering

UW Extension Wisconsin Youth Livestock © 2012  
<http://fyi.uwex.edu/youthlivestock/>

An EEO/AA employer, University of Wisconsin—Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and ADA requirements.