

Setting the PACE

by Susan Rhode, director of communications and public relations



Summer Angus events may not be all fun and games

Summer is here, which means it's time for breeders to get off the farm and get out to a variety of warm-weather Angus events. County fairs, state fairs and field days all are popular gathering spots, allowing breeders and their families the opportunity to compete, to socialize and to learn. However, events for which livestock and their owners gather may not always be fun and games in the minds of animal rights activists.

Even though the occurrence of animal rights or libertarian protests at livestock shows and events has declined significantly in the past decade, there remains a possibility these groups could target an Angus event or another livestock show or event in which

Angus breeders participate. For this reason, you should be prepared to help those in charge take control of any controversial situation that may cause harm to you, your family or livestock or that may attract negative attention to animal agriculture.

What should we expect?

When dealing with activist groups, always expect the unexpected. Their primary goal is to attract attention to themselves and their cause. Attempts to attract attention may include

- Interrupting the event;
- Shouting at attendees;
- Forming a picket line inside or outside the building;
- Distributing handouts to attendees or spectators;

- Intimidating children;
- Hanging banners, flyers or signs;
- Vandalizing property;
- Placing ads regarding the event in newspapers, radio, television or billboards;
- Creating confrontations with exhibitors or attendees; or
- Publicity stunts, such as street theater or costumes.

These groups typically have a well-thought-out plan and have contacted the media before they arrive. In isolated cases, they may not want attention but

rather may want to infiltrate and to get information from exhibitors. Any group, individual or function is fair game as a target, especially events located in or near large cities. Activists have a First

Amendment right to picket and to speak their mind, as long as they are on public property and obey the law.

Do your homework

A disruption by a hostile group is often a surprise. However, show management or local exhibitors may know the possibility of a protest exists. If the event has a history of being picketed or if local groups have a history of protesting at similar events, there are a few precautionary measures you can take:

- Alert local authorities so they are ready to assist;
- Know local rules for picketing (permits, etc.);
- Know your rights and the rights of the protestors; and

- Discuss whether or not anyone will press charges against the group, if appropriate.

Develop a plan

Work with all interested parties, such as other breed or species groups represented at the event, to develop a plan that enables you to act quickly and effectively.

Identify a single spokesperson. This person (who possibly could be *you!*) should be well-informed and comfortable doing interviews with newspapers, radio broadcasters and television stations. A message should be developed, and the spokesperson should use only this message in interviews. Interviews should be conducted away from the protest in a nearby, controlled, quiet area. Avoid debates with protestors, and discourage other exhibitors or attendees from even paying attention or speaking to them. Never agree to be interviewed in an area where protestors can be seen or heard in the background. Insist the reporter move to a different location.

Develop a message. Based on what you and others know about the protest and the group conducting it, prepare a brief message or statement. The statement should have, at most, three key points. Don't try to educate the interviewer or the public during the protest, just address the current situation and create a positive light around the activities and participants. Sample messages are available by contacting the Association Communications and Public Relations Department or by sending e-mail to srhode@angus.org.

Communicate with all participants. Exhibitors, fitters, judges, facility personnel and parents should be aware of what is happening or what could happen during the event. Ask that they not engage in debates with the activists. Their best action is to ignore completely anything that happens. Let them know there is a plan in place to



The Last WORD...

"I did not fight my way to the top of the food chain to become a vegetarian."

— Anonymous

minimize the disruption and that they should contact the person in charge if the media approaches them.

Create a subplan for disruption of a showring event. Be prepared to prevent activists from entering the stage or platform and from gaining control of a microphone. Be prepared to turn off the sound system if an activist does gain control. Know how to contact security immediately if a disruption occurs, or have them available in the building if possible. The announcer should have a statement prepared to read to the crowd while

security is being notified.

Create a subplan for disruption of a nonshowring event. Exhibitors or participants need to be told to notify someone in charge in the case of an activist confrontation or media inquiries. Debates or shouting matches between any participant and activists must be avoided. Exhibitors or fitters should be reminded to use proper husbandry practices, not just at these public events, but always.

With a little preparation and a lot of teamwork, the presence of an activist or animal rights protest can be managed successfully. Any Association regional

managers or staff members present at an event will be ready to help you manage any situation.

If you find yourself on your own, this column gives you the tools you need to minimize the attention the group receives and to set the record straight with any media in attendance. Good luck, and I hope you and your family have a great time out and about this summer!



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