

Showing Success

Stock show professionals share what it takes to succeed in the ring.

by *Raney Lovorn*, editorial intern



PHOTO BY RANEY LOVORN

► The 2015 NJAS showcased 1,169 head of Angus cattle, and with those numbers, standing out in the crowd is no small task. A little hard work and dedication can go a long way.



The road to showing success does not end with selecting the perfect calf, or even with the halter-training process and practicing excellent showmanship. Showing success depends on total calf care, from nose to tail and everything in between. Stock show experts and Purina Honor Show Chow Ambassadors Dave Allan, Bob May and Kirk Stierwalt shared their best stock show tips during the Purina Honor Show Chow VIP hosted at the Purina Animal Nutrition Center in Gray Summit, Mo., June 15-17.

The three stock show experts represent different aspects of the industry, but each is a standout at their specialty. Dave Allan owns a semen distribution company, Genesource, in Schulenburg, Texas. Bob May of Mineral Point, Wis., is noted for his family's showing success and his successful show-steer breeding program. Kirk Stierwalt of Leedey, Okla., handles clippers with artistry and produces show cattle clinics all over the country.

► **Left:** Dave Allan points out a few key aspects to check after fitting an animal. A quality fit job can highlight the animal and increase the chance of success in the showing.

Together they form a stock show A-team and provide insight into show success.

"I would go to shows and find Bob May and sit there and watch him fit one and clip one, and it was the same thing with Kirk Stierwalt. They were the best and they still are two of the best," Allan said.

While it's easy to become jealous of those who win often, those are the ones you need to watch and to ask questions, he notes. "Most of them are great people and they will be glad to share the secrets, because as you will find out there really aren't any; it is mostly about hard work."

Hard work at home

Success often starts from the ground up in show cattle. As genetically superior animals become more available through the use of artificial insemination (AI), it is important to select an animal with great genetics and structure to match.

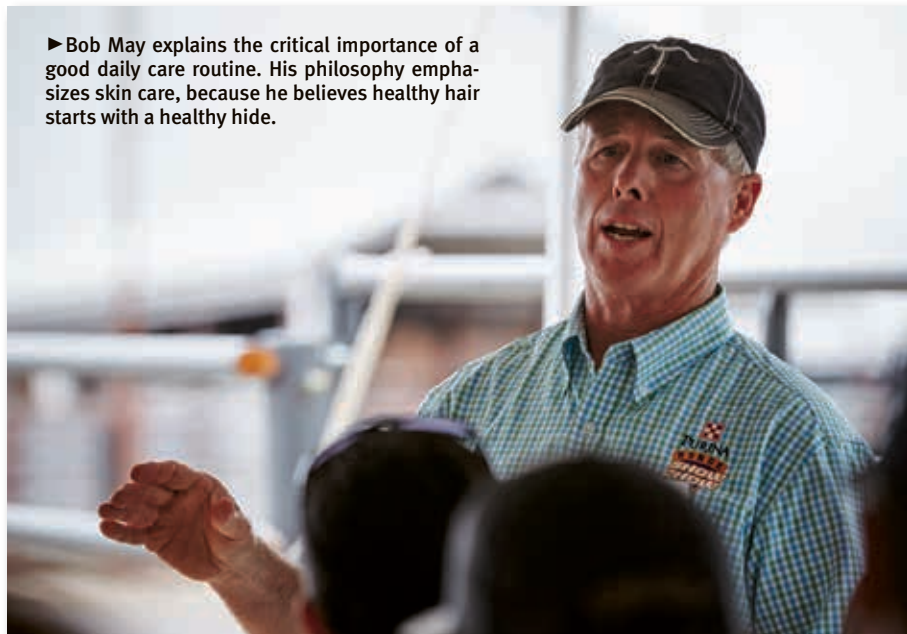
"To get the full genetic potential out of your project, it takes a combination of genetics and environment to achieve the high quality that you want in the end," Allan said.

“You have to have the best genetics out there coupled with the fact that it takes the proper environment, which includes care, feed and all the things that are involved in trying to change that animal physically beyond just its genetic potential.”

Stierwalt emphasized the impact of good nutrition on show cattle. He advised using supplements with new technology that are higher in protein and fat, but are less likely to cause digestive issues like acidosis. Using products like beet pulp or a pelleted feed can help increase rumen fill and decrease intake while maintaining the animal’s body condition. Cottonseed hulls can also make a good, high-fiber filler to maintain body condition and nutrition while stalling gain, especially in mature show heifers, where a slightly lower body condition is ideal prior to breeding.

Because every calf is genetically and phenotypically singular, Stierwalt said building a “tool box” for each calf is important. Monitoring calves’ individual intake, weighing frequently and feeding calves separately are all parts of individualized care that can make a positive impact. Stacking new technology in the tool box can help cattle achieve their potential more quickly than in the past.

“Technology has been a great thing for the cattle industry,” Stierwalt said. There have been many advances in showing tools, he said, noting the variety of clipper blades, quality feeds and other tools available to today’s showmen. “We can tap into [these technologies] to get the look out of them and the performance out of them that we want.”



► Bob May explains the critical importance of a good daily care routine. His philosophy emphasizes skin care, because he believes healthy hair starts with a healthy hide.

A recurring theme between Stierwalt, Allan and May was the importance of structural soundness in show animals. Each emphasized that although animals can be fed, fitted and exhibited exceptionally, an animal with poor structure will never correct itself.

May and Allan covered daily animal care, highlighting show animal health. Practices like using an oil-based (to reduce dandruff) topical wormer often, vaccinating as needed with vaccines tailored to a specific geographical region, and washing with medicated shampoo to avoid bringing in parasites after time on the road can all affect showing and cow herd success.

Work in the chute

In Stierwalt’s cattle-fitting seminar, he attributed the evolution of clippers to making cattle fitting a sport for all ages and genders. Because the first shears used on cattle were large and cumbersome, it left little opportunity for women or children to use them effectively. As clippers became more compact, all ages have brought more competition to the sport.

Lightweight, high-speed clippers with sharp blades are Stierwalt’s preference when fitting cattle. A clipper with a fine rubber grip is also preferable because it allows for more control and precise cutting.

“I run my clippers on high. That’s the clean cut; that’s the fast cut; and that’s the one that gives you the best edge,” Stierwalt said.

He advised fitters to keep their clippers clean and lubricated to protect their investment and also to guard against disease and parasite transfer between calves. When clipping cattle for show, he advised keeping a steady hand, having a calm calf and using an awareness of the calf’s body to sculpt the hair into the desired look.

All three professionals agree success in the showing does not have a set formula or a magic number. The tricks of the trade are actually just a wide variety of areas that require an immense amount of hard work and dedication. Just as each professional had their specialty, showing cattle offers a wide variety of opportunities for youth to succeed, Stierwalt said. Whether it be fitting, feeding, breeding or exhibiting, the stock show life has endless chances for a willing, hardworking individual to become a champion.

“There is something in this for everyone,” Stierwalt said. “It is hard to win with a skinny calf with a nice haircut.”



► Kirk Stierwalt showcases his precision with fast, sharp clipper blades, while teaching attendees how to get the perfect top cut.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KAYLA JENTZ