

Points to Consider When Purchasing Companion Animals, Livestock or Horses

By Carrie Chickering-Sears

It is that time of the year, when 4-H youth start thinking about purchasing their project animal for the next show season. If this is your first time buying a project animal, remember to do your research. Once you know what breed of dog, livestock or horse that you want to purchase, you can contact the respective national breed association to locate reputable breeders in your area.

Breeders: Choosing a breeder is not something that you should decide on quickly. Choosing a breeder is almost as important as choosing your animal. Choose wisely, and you have an excellent chance at a champion show animal or a loving, obedient pet. Choose poorly, and you could end up with an animal with serious behavior or genetic problems. Good breeders work to improve their chosen breed and want the best for their animals. A good breeder will help to determine the suitability of the breed for you, as well as the individual animal. Do you want a show animal? A family pet? What sort of temperament are you looking for?

When you choose to purchase an animal from a breeder, you are also purchasing health guarantees and lifetime advice. You can view relatives of your animal, judge temperament and appearance, and see the farm, stable or kennel for yourself. In short, buying from a breeder allows you options unavailable elsewhere.

Auctions: You can find top livestock and horses at dispersals and consignment auctions. Beware though, if this is your first time buying an animal, you should make sure that you take someone with you that knows what to look for in your chosen species. Some auctions might mask a horses' disposition by doping or tiring the animal prior to the sale. At an auction, you have to make a quick decision and you do not always get to meet the breeder.

Budget: Spend as much as you can afford for your animal, but higher price does not always mean a better animal. Screen any breeder/seller thoroughly no matter what the cost of the animal. Research prices in the respective breed journals and magazines to find out what animals are selling for. Another key point is to let the breeder know that you are looking for a 4-H project since some breeders have special rates for 4-H'ers. Some breeders feel more confident knowing the animal is going to a home where the youth will be receiving directions on their care. Breeders also know that 4-H'ers show their animals and hopefully will provide a quality animal.

Health Check: Once you decide on an animal. Locate a Vet to check the health of the animal prior to purchasing. If purchasing a pregnant animal, make sure to have the Vet confirm the pregnancy and once confirmed have the Vet administer the appropriate shots. If purchasing an animal from out of state, make sure to have the appropriate health tests required by our state. You can call your local Vet to check on what is required. Livestock should receive shipping fever shots.

Registration Papers: Make sure to sign all the paperwork (registration and/or transfer paper) the day you purchase the animal. I hear numerous reports about youth who do not receive their registration paper for months after the date of sale. I suggest that if a transfer fee is required, you get a check from the seller to send in with the paperwork to the breed association. This way, you are sure to receive the paperwork in a timely fashion.

Ownership Dates: Shows and 4-H fairs have required dates of ownership that vary between the animal species. Make sure to verify the dates with your 4-H leader or your local Extension Educator before you start your search.

Insurance: I recommend that if you are purchasing an expensive (over \$2,000) livestock or horse project that you insure them for their value. At the time of the health check, you can have the Vet complete the insurance application form. You can find out information on Livestock & Horse Insurance at www.livestockins.com

Another Option: There are many good horses available that have been youth/4-H projects but sadly have been outgrown or the youth is going away to school. Your 4-H leader is a good resource in helping you locate a new horse. Remember to ride the horse more than one time to make sure that the horse is sound and sensible.

Isolating your New Animal: It is a good idea to keep your new animal isolated for at least ten days to insure that they are not carrying a virus, especially if you have other animals at your house.

I hope these tips aid you in selecting your project animal for next year. Never be shy about asking someone else's opinion about your animal, because ultimately that is what happens when you present him/her to a judge. If you have any questions, please give me a call at 413-549-3257 or Nancy Searle at 413-577-0788. Good luck on your selections!