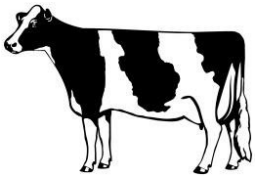
2026 DAIRY FEEDER PROJECT POLICES AND PROCEDURES



Species-Chair:

Greg Bancroft * nwmlcdairyfeeder@gmail.com * 231-313-8063

Assistant Species-Chair:

Rick Tallieu * nwmlcdairyfeeder@gmail.com * 231-313-8063

Administrative Species-Chair

Andrea Bedrick * nwmlcdairyfeeder@gmail.com * 231-499-0570

IMPORTANT DATES		IMPORTANT INFO	
Registration	March 2nd, 2026	Minimum Weight @ Fair (No minimum weight for Cloverbuds)	350 lbs
Birth Date After December 1st, 2025			
Possession	March 1st (Cloverbuds: May 1st)	Record Book (Both Market and show only)	Required Due: 9/7/2026
Tagging	May 2026	Thank You Note	Required Due: 10/5/2026

Participating 4-H youth must abide by all general rules and regulations listed in the Northwest Michigan 4-H Livestock Council's Policies & Procedures books and the Premium Book of the Northwestern Michigan Fair. This includes, but is not limited to, Code of Conducts, registration deadlines, showmanship and market requirements, record book and thank you letter requirements, etc.

Registration Requirements

- To participate in a 4-H market dairy feeder project, youth must attain the age of eight (8) or older by January 1st of that calendar year and be registered with 4-H Online 2.0
- All Dairy Feeder Participants (Market, Show only and Cloverbuds) MUST complete the online registration via the Northwest Michigan 4-H Livestock Council's website NO LATER THAN midnight on the first Monday of March.
  - Optional: Each 4-H market dairy feeder participant may register an extra calf for $10, to be paid on tagging day. The extra calf may only be used within the family that purchased the calf and only one (1) market calf may be brought to the fair per 4-H member. Bring your best calf!
- To participate in the 4-H livestock shows and auction at the fair, youth must follow all registration requirements listed in the Northwestern Michigan Fair's Premium Book.
- To participate in the 4-H livestock auction at the fair, youth must register and compete in the appropriate showmanship AND market classes.

Animal Requirements

- All cattle MUST have an official radio frequency identification (RFID) electronic tag in their ear before they leave the farm on which they were born.
- Dairy feeder calves must be born on or after December 1st of the current year.
- Dairy feeder calves must be in possession or under the care of the 4-H member by March 1st.
- Dairy feeder calves must be 100% dairy breed: Holstein, Brown Swiss, Guernsey, Jersey, etc. The calf can be a cross of 2 or more dairy breeds but cannot be crossed with a beef breed.
- Calf can be a heifer or a steer.
  - Heifer calves will be judged in the same classes as the steers.
  - Dairy feeder steer calves need to be properly castrated and the castration procedure must be COMPLETELY HEALED showing no signs of swelling, discharge, or decay upon check in at the fair. This should be completed at least 3-4 weeks before fair to ensure proper healing time.
- All calves must be dehorned and show signs of dehorning. This should be done early so that it is healed by fair time. Horns cannot exceed 3".
- All dairy feeder calves must be vaccinated for the following: Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR), Parainfluenza 3 (PI3), and Bovine Respiratory Syncytial Virus (BRSV)
  - Suggested vaccines include (but not limited to): Inforce 3, Triangle 10 HB, Bovi-Shield Gold, Cattle Master Gold FP5 L5, or Express 5-HS
  - Be sure to ALWAYS carefully read and follow all instructions printed on the label.
  - Vaccines should be given early in the project to help prevent illness.
  - Proof of vaccination is required when unloading at the fair.
- Dairy feeder calves must be weaned off of milk at least 2 weeks before fair.
- Dairy feeder calves must weigh a minimum of 350 pounds at fair check in (except Cloverbud projects).

Fair Week Requirements

- General Requirements:
  - Weigh-in takes place the first Saturday of fair.
    - Youth must be present or must have made prior arrangements with the species chair for someone else to weigh their animal.
  - Protective boots are required at all times for 4-Her's and parents when working with your calf (tennis shoes or sandals are not permitted)
  - No feed, feed bags, or supplies are to be left in the barn (everything must be stored at the campsite).
  - Youth are responsible for keeping their pens clean all week.
- Animal Care Requirements:
  - **Animals shall be treated humanely at all times. Any reports of unethical, inhumane, and/or abusive treatment or actions that cause distress and/or suffering to an animal will be evaluated by the Species Chair, Fair Superintendent, Fair Veterinarian, MSU Extension Staff and/or other appropriate individuals and may lead to disqualification and removal from all 4-H and Open Livestock Shows held at the Fair.**

- Youth are responsible for providing enough grain and hay to care for their calf throughout the entire week.
- Youth are responsible for feeding, watering, and caring for their animal the **entire** week**.**
- Water shall remain full and fresh at all times.

- Show Day Policies:
  - For the safety of the exhibitors and the public, all cattle barns will close 2 hours prior to the start of the first cattle show.
    - During barn closure times, only the 4-H'er and ONE (1) support person of their choice may enter the barn and/or wash rack areas.
    - The 4-H'er and support person may be required to wear an identification badge while in these areas.
  - The 4-H'er and their support person may fit and prepare the calf for show.
- Fair End Responsibilities:
  - Completely clean and scrape down pens
  - Pen boards need to be taken home or stored on the pallets at the end of the barns. All boards not taken home at the end of fair become the property of the fair.
  - Bars on the pen dividers need to be scrubbed and wiped down.

After Fair Requirements

- All market dairy feeder participants must turn in a completed record book at the September Livestock Council meeting to the specie chair.
- NO electronic record book submissions will be accepted.
- A Thank You and 5 x 7 Auction photo must be given to your buyer and a copy of the Thank You note is due at the October Livestock Council meeting.
- Failure to submit a completed record book at the September meeting and a Thank You at the October Meeting of the 4-H Livestock Council WILL result in suspension from the 4-H Livestock classes and auction held during the NWMI Fair the following year. Suspended youth who complete their record book and submit it to the 4-H Livestock Council by the November meeting that same year will again be eligible to register for 4-H Livestock classes and auction held during the NWMI Fair the following year.

Important Information & Tips for a Successful Dairy Feeder Project

Helpful Info

- Cost:
  - Most calves will cost between $200 and $300
  - Average cost of feed to raise a dairy feeder project is $500 to $600
- Housing: Calf must:
  - Be kept out of drafts
  - Be sheltered from weather
  - Have room to move
  - Have proper bedding (straw, wood chips, sawdust, or sand)
- Nutrition:
  - Fresh water at all times. Ensure that it does not freeze throughout the winter
  - Calf should be fed a 14-16% protein grain mixture
  - Calf should be fed 2 times a day
  - Calf should be fed 3% of its body weight per day – Weigh calf often to

- ensure that you are feeding the proper amount
- Different Feeds:
  - Energy – a mixture of cracked or rolled corn, oats, protein pellets, and vitamins – Calves should not be given whole corn as they cannot process it well
  - Roughage – hay, silage
  - Supplements – soybean meal, processed supplements from feed mill/store

- Health:
  - Observe daily: Note any difference in behavior (not eating, not getting up, sluggish, ears down, etc) or any difference in appearance (bloating, runny nose, mucus eyes, etc). Changes in behavior or appearance usually indicate something is wrong; seek help or advise from a veterinarian immediately
  - It is highly recommended that the calf be dewormed when you get it home and again before fair. Keep records and take note of the withdrawal period.
  - Wash and clip your calf several times before the fair so it gets used to it
    - When washing, use soap 1 out of every 5 times; soap can cause dry flakes
    - Do not put soap directly on the calf, mix into a bucket of water
    - ALWAYS start with the legs so that the calf can get used to the cool water; putting cold water on their body first can cause them to go into shock
  - Keep pen clean and dry (especially with light colored calves)
  - Keep fly strips in the barn and pen, high enough so the calf and children cannot reach them
  - Keep calf fly spray on hand for when the flies get bad and bother the calf. This will help with health and training
  - Be observant of dewormer withdrawal times due to potential of being slaughtered
- Training:
  - Start slow: Begin by just watching and talking to your calf
  - Tie your calf to a fence post or secure object for an hour or two at a time. This will get it used to being restrained and standing still. This is also a good time to brush it down so that it gets used to being touched. For safety reasons, never leave your calf alone when it is tied up
  - Expose your dairy feeder to as many sights and sounds as possible, i.e. play a radio in the barn
  - Be sure to practice with the show halter and show stick that will be used during fair
  - Attend as many showmanship practices as possible
- Fair Week Show Attire:
  - Clean pants or jeans (free of rips or holes)
  - Long or short sleeve dress shirt (button-down is recommended)
  - Protective boots or leather shoes
  - A show comb for your back pocket
  - Calf will need a leather show halter and show stick

Tips

- BEFORE you bring the calf home, be sure to have the pen ready and grain or milk replacer (bottles), if necessary, on hand. The ride home is hard on them, so put water and food in pen right before the calf arrives

- Dairy Feeder Calf Selection:
  - Pick a healthy calf
  - Twins are often weaker and grow slower and therefore are not usually a good choice
    - NOTE: A twin heifer to a bull calf is called a freemartin and is often unable to be bred
  - Larger dairy breeds (Holsteins and Brown Swiss) make the best gainers
  - It is recommended that the calf be 90-100 pounds at time of purchase in order to obtain optimal market weight
- ASK QUESTIONS!!! If you encounter a situation or a question that you don't know the answer to, be sure to ask for help. Reach out to the species chair, your club leader, another member raising a dairy feeder, or any member of the Livestock Council Board. If that person does not have the answer, they WILL help you get it.
- Education – Attend as many education sessions and events as possible to help further your knowledge of your species
- Keep Good Records – Use a calendar to track purchases, weekly feeding schedules, weight gain, and medications. This information is important for your record book and also is a great guide to use for the next dairy feeder project.
- Basic Supplies Needed:
  - Feed Dish & Water Bucket
  - Weight Tape
  - Nylon Halter with Chain and Lead Rope
  - Leather Show Halter
  - Show Stick
  - Scotch Comb (carried in your back pocket during shows)
  - Soft Bristle Brush
  - Shampoo, Scrub Brush, Hoof Brush
  - Bedding
  - Grain & Hay
  - Bottle with Nipple & Milk Replacer
  - Fly Spray
  - Boots
  - Show Clothes
  - Chain or Neck Tie (to tie calf in the stall at fair)

Cloverbuds

- 4-H members who are 5-7 years of age (as of January 1st of the current year)
- Cloverbuds have their own showmanship class. It will be held on the same day as the other cattle showmanship classes, usually Tuesday or Wednesday of fair
- Cloverbuds may bring their own calf to the fair OR they may choose to show someone else's calf
  - Cloverbuds that are bringing their own calf must have it in possession by May 1st
  - Cloverbuds do NOT have a minimum weight requirement for their calf
- Cloverbuds are not allowed to market their calves
- For safety reasons, ALL Cloverbud Showman MUST have a parent, legal guardian, or GOLD 4-H Volunteer/Club Leader with them while they are handling their animal at all times during fair week to ensure the overall safety of the Cloverbud and the animal