“What’s that smell?!”
and Other Questions Commonly asked by Students during NAILE Tours

When walking through the barns at a livestock show, children often see or experience things they may not understand. Here are some commonly asked questions, and answers you may wish to respond to them.

1. **What is that smell?**
   You will smell some strong odors when walking through the barns. The strange smell is usually stall bedding. Each stall has a mound about eight to twelve inches high of wood chips and straw. The bottom layer is usually wetted down to make it firm – this is kind of like the smell of your dog on a rainy day. The animals are stalled on this bedding for a few days so their waste (when they go to the bathroom) also accounts for some of the smell. People complain about the smell of manure, but usually the disinfectant (cleaner) that is used on the floors smells much worse.

2. **Why do I need to watch where I step?**
   Manure does not look or smell good on your shoes. However, stepping in it won’t hurt you. If you stay in the aisles and watch where you step, you should be okay. But do not step in the stall areas – it’s messier there and you might frighten an animal.

3. **Does it hurt when they shear the sheep?**
   Shearing does not hurt the sheep. Shearing sheep is similar to getting your hair cut. In the summer they need to be sheared to keep them from getting hot. Plus, the wool is an important product that sheep produce. Wool sheared from the sheep can be used to make clothing like sweaters, coats and blankets. Wool is also used to make car seat covers, dog beds, rugs and more, plus the lanolin in wool is used to make lotion. Just like all livestock products, wool has many uses.

4. **Why don’t they hand milk the cows? Don’t the machines hurt?**
   Milking machines are much more efficient than hand milking. A person can hand milk 6 cows per hour, while as a machine can milk 35 cows per hour! The machines are designed not to hurt the cow and they help in getting more milk from each cow.

5. **Why do you keep the animals in cages/stalls/chutes?**
   Animals are kept in stalls while at the North American for many reasons. Tying them in stalls gives you the opportunity to view them from far away and up close. If all the animals were running free, it would be hard for the exhibitors to figure where their animals were. Grooming chutes or stands are used to keep the animals from moving around while they are being groomed.

6. **How did you get the cows here? Did you walk them here?**
   Most of the animals were brought in stock trailers to the Exposition Center. The cattle are unloaded off the trailer at the entrance of the barns. Then the cattle are walked into the barn and tied into stalls.
7. **How much do they weigh?**
An average bull weighs 1800-2100 pounds. An average cow weighs between 1200-1500 pounds. An average steer shown at the North American is 1250 pounds. If the average 8-year-old child weighs about 60 pounds that means that the cow you see in the barns today weighs about the same as 20 eight-year-old kids!

8. **What do they eat?**
Show cattle are fed many different types of crops. Corn, Oats, Soybean Meal, Beet Pulp, Molasses and other feeds.

9. **How much do they travel?**
Cattle travel from across the United States and Canada to show in Louisville. Some cattle may only compete in one or two shows a year, but some champions may show as often as a dozen times.

10. **Why do they have pierced ears? Rings in their noses? Brands/tattoos?**
Animals have tags in their ears for identification purposes. Each farmer will give the animals an identification number that is written on a plastic or metal tag placed in the ear.

Bulls that are over a year old are required to have a nose ring in order to enter the show. Nose rings are used to make the bull behave or pay attention. (Similar to your parents grabbing your ear to make you behave or pay attention.)

Brands are like tattoos on the cattle. Some farms have a unique brand design that they use to identify their cattle, so they don’t get mixed up with the cattle of their neighbors.

11. **How smart are the animals? Do they like going to livestock shows?**
Animals react in different ways to coming to cattle shows. Just as some kids like to get up in front of class and talk, some cattle like to come and show off. Some kids don’t like going on vacation, because they miss their home and friends. Some cattle are the same, they miss being at home and being with their friends.

12. **Do the animals bite? Can they hurt me?**
No, cows will not bite you. However they kick, so you need to be cautious when walking behind the animals.

13. **Can I touch the animals?**
Petting the animals is allowed in the Children’s Barnyard Area. However, when walking through the barns, it is not permitted to pet the animals. Please do not put your hand through the fences because you might scare the animal. A scared animal could accidentally hurt you.