

Selecting a Project Dairy Heifer

Choosing a project heifer can be a difficult and confusing decision. Whether purchasing a heifer or choosing one from the family herd many of the same tips apply. First you must decide if a particular breed is important. This can be a personal preference choice. Each breed can offer different characteristics so you may want to research the breeds before a particular breed is chosen for a project. The breed you choose is really based on personal preference.

After a breed has been chosen, it is time to select the animal for the project. Age of the exhibitor and animal are both very important considerations. The age of the exhibitor should match the age of the animal. A nine year old will have an easier time working with a calf than a yearling heifer. The animal chosen should also be born towards the beginning of a class. Heifer classes are broken down every 3 months. If the heifer is born March 1st for example she will be the oldest heifer in the junior calf class. This will give her more time to grow and develop than a heifer born April 30th. However, a very correct, well grown younger heifer can work well but is showing at a disadvantage most of the time.

Now it is time to think about conformation or type. To make the most of the show experience the heifer should be well grown for her age, straight in her

lines, dairy and have a correct set of feet and legs. If you are adding a heifer to the family herd then you may also want to look at the milk production pedigree and what the heifer's dam looks like. Besides looking good, the heifer should show signs of good health. The last thing you want to do is add health problems to your herd.

Finally and most importantly make sure your paperwork is correct. The simplest method is to register the animal in the 4-H or FFA member's name only. If there are partnerships involved you must check with the respective youth organization and follow any rules that apply. If you plan to show in breed sponsored junior shows then you will also want to check with the breed organization regarding ownership rules. Another option for youth not wishing to own an animal is the non-ownership project. In this project a youth leases the heifer from a farmer. Each youth organization has rules and paperwork that must be completed for this option as well.

If you have any questions about paperwork, rules or other questions all you need to do is ask. Look to more experienced breeders or youth professionals to help you answer your questions. The most important thing to remember when choosing a dairy heifer is that this should be a positive learning experience for the youth. Finding the

right heifer can be a chore but it can
mean a friendship that lasts a lifetime.

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