

Turkey Fitting and Showmanship

Members Guide Lines

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Introduction

Fitting and Showmanship has become an important activity in many county fairs as a part of the 4-H animal youth projects. In Michigan, 4-H members in small animal production have a few areas where fitting and showmanship guidelines are provided at the state level. Chicken and rabbit fitting showmanship are carried out at state and local levels for the last few years. In the northern part of Michigan the 4-H turkey project is a popular poultry project and youth exhibit birds regularly under the above category in county fairs. This bulletin is developed with the intention that those youngsters will also get an equal opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge with their turkeys under fitting and showmanship contests at the state as well as in local county fairs.

Objective

The objectives of a turkey fitting and showmanship contest are to develop:

1. An inquiring mind and an eagerness to learn in members
2. The member's ability to apply scientific knowledge
3. Practical skills in members
4. Leadership qualities in members
5. Competition and sportsmanship in members
6. Socially acceptable behavior and values in members
7. A special interest in raising turkey in the member
8. A better image about turkey raising in the minds of people who attend showmanship contest.
9. An appreciation for turkeys and the knowledge of how to handle the birds in a humane way.

Fitting

Fitting is a word used to describe how a 4-H member selected a turkey from a breed and how the member fed and cared for the bird prior to the contest so that it is neither over- nor underweight. The term also encompasses any preparation of the bird prior to the contest such as treating for lice and mites, cleaning the feathers, and trimming the nails. Fitting also includes the participant's general appearance.

A Word About Commercial Turkey Production

In Michigan, turkey production for meat is the second largest enterprise of the Michigan Allied Poultry Industries (M.A.P.I.) Michigan is ranked 14 in the nation for turkey production and has produced a total of 2,700,000 turkeys in 1986. North Carolina, Minnesota, California, Arkansas and Missouri are the top states in the order of ranks in turkey production in the U.S. Total number of turkeys produced in the U.S. in 1986 was 207,216,000. The common strain of turkey used today commercially is called Broad Breasted White and the leading company in the business is Nicholas.

As per the "standard of perfection", there are 8 varieties of turkeys. They are Beltsville Small, Black, Bourbon Red, Bronze, Margansett, Royal Palm and White Holland Turkeys.

Selection of a Turkey

Any variety of turkey may be selected for showmanship except wild turkeys. Wild turkeys are protected breeds. Broad Breasted Bronze, and Broad Breasted Whites are commonly seen exhibited at county fairs. To raise a few turkeys one may start with poult which are probably obtained from hatcheries. Under proper management a tom will weigh 18-27 lbs. and a hen will weight 13-18 lbs. in a period of 15 – 20 weeks of age. Younger 4-H members may choose a younger bird for the fitting and showing. However, no turkey should be selected for showmanship less than 10 weeks of age.

As guideline, junior members may choose turkeys 10-12 weeks of age. Intermediate age groups may choose turkeys approximately 15 weeks of age while senior members may choose 15 weeks of age or more. Adult birds may also be chosen (1 year or older) if one desires so. 4-H members may select a hen or a tom for showmanship. However, select the turkey which has no blemishes or disqualification points. Make sure selection at least one month before the show so that the member has ample time for training the bird for showmanship.

Feed and Caring for the Turkey

Once you have selected the turkey, which probably is the best out of what you have, give special attention and care to this bird. Feed a high protein ration such as turkey starter so that the confirmation and fleshing of the bird will be ideal and overall condition will be at its best. Keep the bird in a separate cage or pen and expose the bird to other members of the family so that at the show, the bird will not be frightened of people. Make sure to work with your bird daily for posing, examining etc. so that the bird will perform easily and at its best. If the turkey has any

poultry lice or mites on it you may want to treat it for 2-3 weeks prior to the show. Use Seven or any other insecticide available locally at elevators. You may check for lice under the wings, around the vent. Mites may be seen hidden on shanks.

If proper feeding and caring has been given to your turkey, the bird should be in an excellent condition with respect to confirmation and fleshing feathering etc. However, in order to make your bird outstanding at the show table, it is recommended to do a few “final touches”.

Materials needed for the final preparation include:

- 2 buckets
- soap
- pair of scissors
- warm water
- paper towels
- soft clothes
- blow dryer
- an old tooth brush
- canine clippers
- mineral oil or petroleum jelly

If the turkey selected is white and if the plumage is white, you may use cornmeal to clean the feathers. Use the cornmeal over the plumage and rub on the feathers. Use your palm for this process of rubbing and do it toward the feather rather than against it. Start from head area and go down towards tail. If the feather is dirty on a particular spot you may use soap water to clean it in that area. Again clean the spot with a soft cloth and use it towards the feather.

If the turkey is colored or the plumage is more dirty, then one may decide to give a “bath” to the turkey. You may use your laundry tubs for this if available or simply use two buckets. One bucket with soapy water while the other with clean water to rinse the bird. If you need to give a bath, plan a couple of days proper to the show to do it so that the bird can condition back the feathers by preening.

Use a soft cloth to clean the bird with soap water. If you use the laundry tub, make sure the water level is below the ears so that water will not get into this opening. Rub towards the plumage and rinse the bird with clean water. Use the toothbrush with soap water to rub against the shank, foot, toes, and between the toes. Rinse those parts clip toes nails if necessary (only if they are too long). One may use scissors to trim feathers if necessary. Use another soft cloth or paper towel to dry the bird. If a hair blow dryers is available use this to dry the bird after removing most of the water by paper towel or soft cloth. Use the blow dryer towards the feathers rather than against it.

Final Touch

No your turkey is hopefully clean. Well, you may want to give a final touch to make the turkey even look better.

Transfer a little oil or Vaseline to a soft cloth and touch the turkeys head- the comb area if tom, beaks, etc. Also rub the cloth the oil against the shank, toe, etc. This should make those areas shine and look much better. However, do not touch the plumage or apply much oil in any of the above parts.

Transportation to Show

4-H members, you have worked hard to prepare your bird for showmanship by proper feeding and caring, training, etc. Remember, transporting the bird in a proper cage with enough ventilation is also very important. Otherwise you may be disappointed to see your bird is dead due to the lack of ventilation or messy due to poor carrying cage. If possible, construct a cage for transporting with plenty of ventilation. During the summer time, it is even more important.

Guidelines for the Participant

The fitting and showmanship contest for turkey is generally an annual event and may have several curious spectators. Remember, a turkey fitting and showmanship contest is as important to the turkey raiser as a horse, beef, swine, sheep and chicken fitting showmanship contests are to their respective producers. Therefore, your appearance is important. In a county level contest, the superintendent may recommend the dress code. In the state contest, it is recommended that you wear a show coat or any other neat and clean attire, such as dark pants and a light-colored, long sleeved shirt or blouse. Hair should be properly combed. Wear appropriate shoes; bare feet are not allowed.

Showmanship

This section of the competition will be held from the time the participants are asked to get their birds from the carrying cages and bring them to the assigned area. Remember that you are being judged from the above point on.

Handling the Bird (Total 10 pts)

Handling the turkey is not going to be an easy task. This means 4-H members should work with the bird on a regular basis. The size of the bird and the size of the contestant are also important. We do not recommend any on to show turkeys over 20 lbs. weight.

There may be several ways to handle a turkey when moving from one place to another. However, the following method is recommended for our purpose. It is important that the 4-H members are taught this method since, this method will be the one judges are expected to judge.

- Step 1 –
Open the door of the cage (1 pt)
- Step 2 –
Turn the turkey sideways so that it stands head to left side of participant. (1 pt)
- Step 3-
Get hold of both legs firmly at the shank area. (2 pts)
- Step 4 –
Put the left hand over the right wing and under the breast area of the bird. (2 pts)
- Step 5 –
Bring the turkey against the participant's chest area. (1 pt)
- Step 6 –
Walk towards the show table in the above position. Right hand grasping both legs while left hand under the breast and over the right wing and back of the bird.
- Step 7 –
Slowly place the bird sideways on the table where you are assigned. Stand back and controlling the turkey. Your bird not stands with its head to the left. Keep looking at the judge for any instructions. (1 pt)

Posing the Turkey

Posing the turkey on the table will be done on an individual basis or as a group. You at this time should be standing behind a table with your turkey already in place on the table on a side way posture. Now it is time for posing the turkey on the table.

- Step 1 –
With one hand hold the turkey under the breast area near the shoulders and with the other hand hold the right leg.
- Step 2 -
Turn the turkey to the right so that the head of the turkey is right in front away from you.
- Step 3 –
Set the legs of the turkey spaced between 6-9 inches (depending upon the size and age of the bird) on a straight line, sideways.

Step 4 –

With your left pointing finger or training stick touch the wattle area beneath the lower beak to get the head carriage. At this time the turkey should stretch out the neck as high as possible.

Step 5 –

Set up the wings properly over the body and tail.

Step 6-

Use the stick to set up the tail. Simply touch the stick under the tail feathers so that the turkey will hold it tightly and show a nice tail carriage.

Step 7 –

Smoothly run the show stick over the back of the neck and smoothly continue to stroke downward. Continue the above over the tail area. It must be one gentle stroke from the neck to the tail area.

Step 8 –

Use your left pointing finger on show stick under the beak and the right palm of your hand under the tail carriage.

Step 9 –

The participant at this time is fully in pose along with the turkey. He should be standing behind the table slightly turning right. At the same time he or she posing the bird and also looking at the judge. However he or she does not have to turn around changing the pose of the turkey even if the judges moves or walks toward the side. But he should tilt his head sideways if necessary so as to look at the judge at all times.

Step 10 –

When the judge gives the command “attention”, the participant should slowly remove the hands from the bird and turn a step to the left so as to be right behind the bird facing the judge. Stand in an attention posture; still looking confident. The bird should also be in the “pose” posture, standing on a pose.

There will be 2 points each for the above steps making a total of 20 points for “posing the turkey on the table”.

Examining of the Turkey

There will be a total of 30 points for the examination of the turkey which is the most important part of the showmanship event. The examination section will follow posing the turkey on the table. When the judge gives the command to “examine your bird”, perform the following steps in sequence to determine confirmation, fleshing, defects, disqualifications and overall condition of your bird.

Step 1 –

Put back the turkey on a side way posture (the same posture you had prior to “posing on the table”).

Step 2 -

Participant take a step back and look over the bird for its symmetry and carriage.

Step 3 –

Examination of the Head Area

Hold the bird in the above standing position with right hand over the back of the bird and the left hand for examination of the head area.

- a. Examine the beak – check both the upper and the lower beak. Any sign of crooked beak?
- b. Examine the snood, if present – touch and feel it. What is the texture? Is it long or short? Young birds may have small snood.

Examination of the Crown (the area between the eyes and ears)

Point your finger to the ear also. Check for the development of caruncles.

Step 4 –

Examination of the Throat Area

After examining the head area one should start examining the throat area. Is the wattles developed? What is the texture? Feel between your fingers. What are caruncles? Is it developed? What is the color?

Step 5 –

Examination of the Neck Area

How long is the neck? Is it erect. Where does it end? Any signs of molting?

Step 6 –

Examination of the Back Area

Put your palm of your right hand on the back and run down to feel the feathers. Is it smooth? Any signs of molting? How long is the back? How wide is the back? It is important in regard to confirmation.

Step 7 –

Examination of the Tail

Are all tail feathers present? Any signs of molting? What is the condition of the tail feathers? Is the tail carriage good?

Step 8 –

Examination of the Abdomen

Is the vent visible? Any signs of lice in this area? What is the condition of the fluff feathers?

Step 9 –

Examination of the Thigh Area

How much meat on the thighs and the drumsticks? How large is the thigh? Remember, turkey is a meat bird.

Step 10 –

Examination of the Legs

Examine both the legs for any defect such as bowed legs, crooked toes etc. Examine the shank area for cleanliness, and mites. Any spurs on the shanks? Count the number of toes, examine the nails on toes and finally the foot. Any defects?

Step 11 –

Examination of the Breast

How big is the breast of the turkey? Is it loaded with meat and well rounded or the breast bone sticking out. Is the breast bone (keel bone) straight and long or is it short, dented or curved? What is the condition of the plumage on the breast? Is it in molt?

Step 12 –

Examination of the Crop

Can you feel the crop? Is it full or empty?

Step 13 –

Examination of the Beard

Does your turkey have a beard on the breast area? What is the color of it? How long is the beard?

Step 14 –

Examination of the Wings

Examine the left wing and the right wing. Open and spread the wings one at a time. Examine the primary and secondary feathers? Any signs of molting? What is the condition of the covert feathers? Look under the wings for any sign of lice.

Step 15 –

Examination of the Rib Cage

How large is the rib cage of your turkey? How many ribs can you count? Are the ribs placed well apart? Make once again an overall look for the balance of symmetry of your turkey. After completion of the examination of your turkey, step back so that the judge can examine your bird for its “condition”.

Total points for the “Examination” is 30.

Condition of the Turkey (20 points)

The condition of the turkey in this case denotes its production characteristics (fleshing and conformation), feather condition, freedom from defects, general health and fitting. The judge will examine each bird on the table in a general way; this may not be a very detailed examination due to the time factor. However, the judge will thoroughly examine the fitting of the bird.

Attitude and Behavior of the Participants (10 points)

Every eye will be on the participants; therefore, it is absolutely necessary for you to act properly. Remember that this is also a time of fun for you. You have the opportunity to show the audience and the judge that you are competent and proud to be a part of the contest. Be alert and put on a smile as you complete the various steps. Look at the judge from time to time to make sure you have his/her attention.

Be on your best behavior and be courteous. If the judge asks you questions, answer them politely. Use the word “sir” or “madam” when asking or answering questions. Remember, if all contestants know what to do and how to perform the various steps, the judge will then have to make a decision based on the minor points. Display sportsmanship and congratulate your peers.

Quiz

At the state level, the turkey quiz is part of a separate option of the Michigan 4-H Poultry Expo. In the country, the quiz is generally given to each participant in each division at the end of the contest to test his/her general knowledge about turkeys. There are several ways this can be done. If there are only a few contestants, the judge may decide to call each participant to an area to answer a set of questions on a one-to-one basis. Each contestant will be instructed not to talk to the other contestants about the quiz. Everyone will be given the same quiz to allow for consistency within each division.

The number of questions asked will depend on the age division, the time allowed, etc. The quiz will usually consist of the questions of general knowledge of turkey. The quiz may be oral or written. The advantage of a written test is that every participant can take the test at the same time and thus time is saved. The written quiz requires prior planning; however, the oral quiz gives each participant a chance to experience the interview process. Good Luck!

Score Card

	COUNTY Points Allowed	STATE Points Allowed
I. Handling turkey	10	15
II. Posing turkey on table	20	25
III. Examination of turkey	30	30
IV. Condition of turkey	20	20
V. Turkey Quiz	10	--
VI. Appearance, attitude, and behavior of participant	10	10
- appearance (5)		
- attitude (2)		
- behavior (3)		
	_____	_____
Total Points	100	100

