

**Date:** February 6, 2026

**To:** All 4-H Dairy Cattle Project Members and Leaders

**From:** Kayla Mitchell, Program Coordinator - 4-H Youth Development

**Re:** 2026 Project Information and Updates

This is a quick update on the events that will take place for the 2026 fair season within the dairy department. Should you have questions, please feel free to contact the MSU Extension office at 269-467-5511. **Please note that the information contained in this letter is subject to change.**

**NEW for 2026:**

- The St. Joseph County Grange Fair will **NOT** require loadout to be done by 11:00 a.m. on Sunday, September 27. There will not be fireworks or rides operating that day.
  - ALL YOUTH are still expected to be at barn clean up at 5:30 a.m. on Sunday to tear down gates and clean specie barns. Exception: dairy cattle only youth who complete tear down Saturday night.

**Reminders:**

- The **4-H Cattle Lease/Borrow Program** form must be filled out and turned in with all appropriate attachments to the MSU Extension office by **August 1**.
  - 4-H members may lease and show up to two animals as a beginner (ages 8-11) showman, intermediate (ages 12-14) showman may show up to three animals and senior (ages 15-19) showman may show up to four animals.
  - Leasees may also show progeny of their previous show 4-H animals but will only receive shares of Gallon of Milk pertaining to member's age. See "General Rule of Interest #1".
- Dairy cattle exhibited in 4-H dairy cattle classes must be purebred stock. No crossbreds. Registration is not required.
- All dairy cattle project animals that are NOT leased must be registered online in FairEntry with fair registrations by **August 15**.
- Any cattle born before April 1<sup>st</sup> of the current year must be **dehorned and completely healed** before the fair.
- **Fair check-in** will be Friday, September 18, 5:00 - 8:00 p.m., and Saturday, September 19, 8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
- If you make your **own pen signs**, you must include: exhibitor's name, club, breed, class, and animal's birthdate. Pedigree is optional.
- **Evaluations:** All dairy cattle exhibitors are required to complete an evaluation notebook and participate in an interview. These will take place on **Saturday, September 19, 2026**. The notebook must have at least one (1) 4"x6" picture of the exhibitor on the cover.
  - **Dress code for Interview:** long pants or jeans with no rips or holes, dress shirt with long or short sleeves (no sleeveless) and does NOT have to be collared, and leather shoes or boots.
- **Dress code for Show:** white shirt, black slacks/pants, belt and leather shoes



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- **The Spring Heifer Calf Class** is born March 1 through July 21 (or after if the calf is progeny of the exhibitor's 4-H cow) of the current year.
- Exhibitors may show up to two animals per breed class.
- Anyone is allowed to prepare animals for show. However, it is expected that the youth exhibitor **will actively participate** in the grooming of their project animal.
- **Dairy Cattle Feeding/Milking schedule:** 5:00 - 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 - 8:00 p.m.
- Cattle may be **loaded out** on Saturday, September 26, from 11:00 p.m. - 12 midnight or Sunday, September 27, at 5:30 a.m.
- **All 4-H livestock members/clubs** will be held responsible for setting up their project pen/stall and decorations before fair, as well as cleaning and tearing down their project pen/stall at the end of fair. Individuals or clubs may be assessed a \$50.00 fine for failure to do so.

#### Electronic Identification (EID) Tags

1. All cattle moving to a show, sale, or exhibition are required to have an official radio frequency identification device (RFID) ear tag. Michigan resident exhibitors may call CentralStar Cooperative at 1-888-203-3398 to order RFID tags at a cost of \$2.90 per tag.
2. All out-of-state cattle exhibited in Michigan shall be tagged with an official radio frequency identification device (RFID) ear tag. For residents outside of Michigan, tags can be ordered by calling Rise' with RJ Matthews Co. at 330-834-3000. It is taking 4-6 weeks to receive tags.
3. All cattle purchased in the State of Michigan, by law, must have an EID tag.

#### General Rules of Interest

1. **Gallon of Milk Pledges:** Proceeds from the sale of the milk will be divided as follows: after expenses, 2% to Dairy Cattle Project Developmental Fund, 5% (capped at \$500.00) to 1st place Dairy Cattle Senior Showmanship winner, each remaining senior showmanship class participant split 5%, with the balance divided among Dairy Cattle project members based on number of dairy animals shown at the fair. If a 4-H member is leasing their dairy project animals: beginning members receive gallon of milk money not to exceed two animals worth, intermediate members may receive gallon of milk money not to exceed three animals worth, senior members may receive gallon of milk money not to exceed four animals worth based on the leasing program.
2. Dairy cattle must be tied to mangers with **rope or leather halters**. Ropes or binder twine tied around the neck is not acceptable.
3. Feed and water buckets/pans must be removed from the stall as soon as the animal has finished eating/drinking. Also, stalls must be cleaned daily (removing wet and manured bedding). The 4-H member is responsible for monitoring when the animal is done eating/drinking and removing buckets/pans accordingly as well as cleaning the stall(s). Failure to follow these rules may lead to "yellow/red-tagging" the exhibit. If a member receives two yellow tags and one red tag, his/her project animal will be sent home and all awards/premiums relating to that animal will be revoked. (See "yellow/red tag" rule in the St. Joseph County 4-H Fair book).

### Important Dates and Deadlines for the Beef Animal/Dairy Market Steer Project

Activity or Event	Date(s) or Deadline	Special Information
4-H Cattle Lease/Borrow Program Forms Due	August 1	MSU Extension Office
Fair Registration Due	August 15	Online via FairEntry
Fair Check-in	September 18 5:00 - 8:00 p.m. or September 19 8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Please refer to the Loading/Unloading Route Map
Evaluations	September 19 3:00 - 5:00 p.m.	<b>This is required for <u>all</u> dairy exhibitors.</b>
Dairy Cattle Show	September 23 10:00 a.m.	Henningsen Show Arena
4-H Market Livestock Sale (Large)	September 24 10:30 a.m.	Sale Order: Lambs, Beef Cattle, Dairy Market Steers, Gallon of Milk, Feeder Steers, Hogs
Load Out and Barn Clean Up	September 26 11:00 p.m. - midnight or September 27 5:30 a.m.	All members are required to clean their pens after loadout. Members showing other species <b>MUST</b> help tear down gates on Sunday morning.