

# USING BUYER LETTERS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR MARKET ANIMAL PROJECT



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**UF** | **IFAS Extension**  
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## Introduction

As you go through the process of selecting, buying, raising, and selling your market animal, you become an entrepreneur. An **entrepreneur** is someone who makes money on their own. The skills you will learn in this project will help you someday be a small business owner, and help you learn basic economic principles that will guide you to achieve this goal.

**Economics** deals with supply and demand and the allocation of scarce resources. The past several years, Florida and the nation experienced a **recession**, which, for our purposes, means that business profits slowed down because people had less money to spend. However, the overall economy is beginning to look better, and we want that growth to be reflected during the market auctions at the Fair, as well.

If you want to be successful and get the best price for your animal, you must market yourself and your animal between now and your buyer letter deadline of **January 6, 2014**, and even beyond that. Before the Fair, you need to find a buyer who is interested in your animal and in you. It is a mistake to show up at the fair auction and expect buyers to bid against each other to drive up the price on your behalf, just because you worked hard and you're there! One part of your project is spending time and energy raising and caring for your animal; the other part is finding the right people to buy your animal. And one of the best ways to do that is with the Buyer's Letter.

## Buyer's Letter

A **buyer's letter** is a letter that a 4-H, FFA, or FCCLA member sends out to potential buyers before the Youth Fair. The member tells the potential buyer a little about themselves and their project animal, and invites them to the Fair and to the livestock auction. This guide will help both first-time and experienced fair exhibitors write successful buyer letters that lead to a better result at the sale.

The Polk County Youth Fair requires each youth to write letters to **two (2)** potential buyers. It is your responsibility to help get new and returning buyers to come to the livestock sales. Without new and returning buyers, we end up with more animals and goods than buyers, and the **supply is greater than the demand**. If this happens, animals could be sold at market price and the exhibitors risk either breaking even on their investments or, worse, losing money.

## How Do I Find a Buyer?

Before you begin writing your letters, it is important to have a plan. Who should I target to receive my buyers' letters? How many should I send out? The fair requires that I send out *two*, but is that really enough? Is it the best I can do?

### Suggestions

- Advertisers listed in the Polk County Youth Fair 2013 ad book
- Companies/organizations that support 4-H and FFA at national or regional levels
- Family Doctor
- Family Dentist
- Eye Doctor
- Orthodontist
- Insurance Agent
- Banker
- Grocery Stores – Winn Dixie, Publix, Aldi, Wal-Mart
- Restaurants
- Hair Stylists
- Mechanics
- Contractors
- Engineers
- Veterinarian
- Feed Store
- Equipment Dealers
- Car Sales Dealers
- Relatives
- Neighbors
- Friends
- Parents' employers
- Your employer (if you are old enough to have a job)

Your goal is to get as many buyers as possible to the fair auction in order to have more buyers than sellers. **This will increase** the price you will receive for your animal. You may need to work harder this year than in past years to get the buyers to the fair. Therefore, you should set a goal of sending out *more* than the *required 2 letters*. You should send out *at least 10-25 letters*.

## Before You Write Your Letter, Consider This

A research study was conducted at the Trinity County Fair in Tennessee regarding the buyers' letters that were sent out by 500 4-H youth to more than 2,000 potential buyers. Before we begin writing our letters, we can learn a lot from this research study.

- Content of the letter: 80% wanted to read about the youth's *history* and the raising of the animal
- Pictures: 80% wanted a *picture* of the animal and the youth
- Handwritten or typed: 60% said it does not matter as long as it is *personal*
- Form Letters: 60% did not like form letters, they wanted a *personal letter*
- Length of the letter: 40% said at least *one page*, 40% said it does not matter as long as it is not too short
- Do you remember the best letter you have received?
  - 25% liked *humor*
  - 25% liked the letter addressed to them by name and appreciated a letter that showed a lot of work went into the project
  - 25% liked little cartoons of the animal with a hand written letter, and
  - 25% liked a full-page letter that focused on the exhibitor that included a *picture*.



## The Buyer's Letter

1. Know to whom you are writing: Owner, business, use first and last names. Be personal, rather than using an obvious form letter. When buyers get to the fair this information helps them make a connection with you.
2. Give them information about your project: Breed of your animal, name of the animal, target final weight, your feeding program, what you hope to accomplish, goals for the future, especially if you're a graduating senior.
3. The fair dates: Let the buyer know the dates and location of the fair, show, and auction. Invite them to the fair to watch you show your animal. Consider including a copy of the Schedule of Events.
4. Tell them how they can participate as a buyer: This is important if they are a first time buyer. Providing potential buyers with all the necessary information will make it easier for them to participate. Also be sure to mention what an **add-on** is. And don't assume they know that the animal goes to slaughter, not home with them (this may be covered in a follow-up phone call).
5. Inform them where they can get more information: People often have questions that you have not answered in your buyer's letter. This provides a way for them to contact you to get answers to their questions. Include a phone number and e-mail address for yourself, and also to the Youth Fair office in Bartow.
6. Thank them for previous participation if they are a buyer from a previous year: If you do this, it may motivate the buyer to come back and bid again. It lets them know you appreciate them taking the time to come to the fair.
7. Include a picture of you and your animal: This helps people connect with you, seeing you as a real person and not just someone asking for money.
8. Keep a copy of each buyer letter for your records.

**Sample Letter: Cheyenne Sharp, Bartow FFA and  
Southern Variety 4-H Club**

September 1, 2013

Mr. and Mrs. Bob Hunter  
23456 South Fort Blount Blvd.  
Bartow, FL 33830

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Bob Hunter:

Hello, my name is Cheyenne Sharp. I am 18 years old and a senior at Bartow High School. This is my third year showing a steer, and however I have shown purebred Polled Herefords for six years now.

This year I am raising a steer to show at the 2014 Polk County Youth Fair. I decided to name him Tuition. I have learned a lot about showing a steer. I found out that it's way different than my Hereford heifers.

Tuition and I will be at the Youth Fair from Wednesday, January 30 through Friday, February 1, 2014. The Fair will be held at the Polk County Agricultural Center, located at 1702 Highway 17 South in Bartow. I would like to invite you to see him on show night, which is on Thursday, January 31, at 6:00 pm, and also bid for him at the steer sale, which is Friday, February 1, at 7:30 pm. If you are unable to bid on him, another way to show your support is by giving an add-on to the purchase price.

If you have any questions for me, please do not hesitate to call me or email me.

Thanks for your support. Tuition and I will look forward to seeing you at the Fair.

Sincerely,

Cheyenne Sharp  
[Barrelracer85236985@aol.com](mailto:Barrelracer85236985@aol.com)  
333-533-3333 - cell phone

## Example

Steven James  
4554 Taylor Pond Road  
Lake Wales, FL 33856  
Sjames11@ aol.com  
(863) 100-0000

September 1, 2013

Mr. Jim Phillips  
President, Marketing  
Phillips Tractor  
4206 Gullet Court  
Lake Wales, Florida 33855

Dear Mr. Phillips:

My name is Steven James, and this is my fourth year in the Big Clovers 4-H Club. I am 15 years old, attend Lake Wales High School, and plan to major in Agribusiness after I graduate, hopefully at the University of Florida. My hobbies include soccer, reading, and sewing.

This year I am raising a steer to show at the 2014 Polk County Youth Fair. His name is Big Beef ("Big" for short). This is my second year raising a steer, but my first year in the Fair because my steer did not make weight last year. I learned a lot from that experience and, now that I know more about proper feeding, I plan to participate in the steer show and auction at the upcoming Fair.

Big and I will be at the Youth Fair from January 29 through February 1, 2014. It will be held at the Polk County Agricultural Center, located at 1702 Highway 17 South in Bartow. The Fair actually begins January 25. I would like to invite you to see him on show night, which is on Thursday, January 30, at 6:00 p.m., and also to bid for him at the steer auction, which is Friday, February 1, at 7:30 p.m.

I have enclosed a picture. If you have any questions for me, you can call me or e-mail me (phone number and email address above) and I will be happy to answer your questions. Also, if you have more detailed questions about the Polk County Youth Fair, you can call the Youth Fair office at 863-519-8677, or email [jejack@ufl.edu](mailto:jejack@ufl.edu). Thank you for your time and attention. Big Beef and I look forward to seeing you at the Fair.

Sincerely,

Steven James

## What is wrong with this letter?

Betty Lou Whonotme  
1456 Lake Buffum Pass  
Fort Meade, Florida 33841

January 5, 2014

Dear Bier at Winn Dixie

I am a seventh grade 4-H youth who is raising a steer for my 4-H project this year. I have been raising steers for 3 years and enjoy learning about animals. I hope to someday become a veterinarian and attend the University of Florida. I have learned a lot about steers from my 4-H animal project.

On Thursday, January 30 at 6 p.m. there will be a Steer Show at the Polk County Youth Fair. The livestock sale will be held Friday night and I hope you will attend that too.

In fact, I will be very disappointed if you do not attend and bid on my steer. My family has been shopping at your store for years and has spent a lot of money. We will stop supporting your store if you do not support me, and you don't want that because you have stores going out of business anyway. If someone else outbids you for my steer, you can always give me an add on amount. A big store like yours should give me at least \$100.

I will be looking for you to buy my steer at the fair.

Sincerely,

Betty Lou Whonotme

## **“Do’s and Don’ts” of Market Animal Buyer Letters**

| <b>Do’s</b>   | <b>Don’ts</b>  |
|---|--|
| Write a rough draft and get it proofread                        | Send your letter without having it proofread               |
| Get the name, position title, and proper address of the contact | Send a letter “To Whom It May Concern” or “Dear Buyer”     |
| Be personal, warm, and inviting                                 | Use a cold, short, “cookie-cutter” letter                  |
| Use proper greeting, such as “Dear Mrs. Jones”                  | Address the person by first name, such as “Dear Bob”       |
| Check your spelling   | Depend only on the <i>Spell Check</i> function             |
| Be gracious and use “Please” and “Thank you”                    | Make demands, or say “you should”                          |
| Use “Sincerely” to close  | Close with “Fondly,” “Regards,” or “Yours Truly”           |
| Sign your letter and include contact information                | Forget to sign your letter and include contact information |

### **Follow-Up**

It is important to keep your buyers informed of you and your project animal’s progress.

#### **Suggestions:**

- Thanksgiving Card
- Christmas Card
- Business Cards
- CD of pictures
- Postcard – Picture of you and your animal

## Thank You's

It is very important to *thank your buyer* and other people who have helped you with your project throughout the year. The thank you letter is required of you in order to get your sale check, but again, don't just do the minimum. It is especially important for your future years in the market project to thank your buyers, including those who purchase add-ons.

## Summary

4-H and FFA livestock projects are more than just raising, feeding, showing, and selling the animal for the most money you can get. The project is about learning life skills and **MARKETING** yourself. The amount of effort and time **YOU** put into it will make all the difference.

If you would like assistance with your letters, or someone to proofread, feel free to call me, Nicole Walker, at my office at 863-519-1045.

