

A Guide to Writing a
Buyer's Letter
And
Buyer List

It's early Spring, your Fair animals are growing well. They look good, are healthy and you think you have a chance of getting Grand Champion this year. You have worked hard and spent lots of time working with your animal so you are ready for showmanship. You are almost ready for Fair but now you need to write your buyer's letter. Obviously, you want to get the best price possible for your animals and a big part of that is getting buyers to come to the Fair and bid on the animals. A good buyer's letter will help not only you, but all the entrants at the Fair because the buyer you invite may not bid on your animal, but they might bid on other exhibitors' animals.

A buyer's letter is a letter that an exhibitor sends out to potential buyers before their County Fair to tell them a little about themselves and their animal, and to invite them to the fair and livestock auction. This guide is for beginning exhibitors or even for more experienced exhibitors. This guide will explain some dos and don'ts about writing buyer's letters and good letter-writing format. Our hope is that exhibitors who are selling animals for the first time can use the guide to write a successful buyer's letter and continuing members might be able to compose a better letter.

Why should you write a buyer's letter? It is your responsibility to help get new and returning buyers to come to the livestock sales. Some people come to the Fair every year and buy one or more animals but without new buyers there might not be enough buyers to purchase all the animals. The prices may drop to a point where exhibitors are losing money by raising their animals. New or returning buyers that are happy with the letters they have received are more likely to come to the Fair and pay the premium prices. Buyers pay far more than market value and it is up to the individual exhibitor to encourage as many potential buyers as possible to come to the Fair and bid on their animals. Buyers like a personal letter from exhibitors, particularly children. It lets them know that you have raised an animal, are exhibiting it at the Fair, and are going to sell it at the livestock auction.

Send letters to anyone who might be willing to buy your animals. The more the merrier! This might include your family doctor, dentist, eye doctor, insurance

agent, or banker. It might also include places where your family does business such as the grocery store, restaurants, mechanic, or contractors. Don't forget to send letters to people who have previously bought your project animals, as well as relatives, neighbors, and family friends. Send a letter to your employer, as well as your parent's employer.

Once you have composed this letter, don't forget to enter it into the Buyer's Letter Competition in the Fair!

Buyer's Survey

The following questions were asked in a poll of potential buyers who may attend the county Fair. Some of those polled have attended the Fair and bought animals. Some have attended the Fair and seldom buy animals and some have never attended the fair or received a buyer's letter but might be willing to attend in the future if they receive the right letter.

1) What kind of content do you like to see in the buyer's letter?

60% said they like to read something about the child's history, 60% said they prefer to receive information on both the animal and history of the child, and 40% said talk about the animal. (Some of those polled put more than one answer so that accounts for the total of more than 100%).

2) Do you like pictures of the animal with the letter?

80% said they preferred photos or drawings of the animal and 20% said it's not necessary .

3) Which kind of letter do you prefer: hand written or typed?

20% said they preferred a typed letter, 20% said they liked a hand written letter, and 60% said it doesn't matter as long as it's personalized.

4) Do you care how long the letter is?

20% said the length of the letter did not matter. 40% said the letters should not be more then one page, and 40% said they did not have a preference as long as the letters aren't really short.

5) Do you like the 4-H members writing about themselves and their animals?

80% said yes, and 20% said they preferred the letter just be about the animal.

6) Is there anything you would especially like to see in a buyer's letter that might motivate you or the people you buy for to decide to bid on a 4H member's animals?

60% said there wasn't anything specific as long as it is personalized, 20% said they did not have any preferences, and 20% like to receive a letter that comes in "flyer" format, (similar to an advertisement).

7) Is there anything that you particularly don't like to see, something that would discourage you from considering bidding?

60% said there wasn't anything that they didn't particularly like to see, 20% mentioned they didn't like form letters, and 20% said they didn't like to read about the specifics of the food or what you are going to use the money for.

8) Do you remember the best letter or letters you have ever received and what did you like about them?

25% said they like humor in the letter, 25% said they like the letter addressed to them by name and appreciate a letter that shows a lot of work went into them. 25% said they like little cartoons of the animal with a hand written letter, and 25% said they like a full page letter that focuses on the exhibitor.

9) Can you think of any letters that did not encourage you to bid and can you tell me what about those letters did not motivate you to bid on the member's animals?

25% said there weren't any letters that stopped them from wanting to buy an animal, 50% said letters like form letters which are a copied signature and that says "Dear Buyer" instead of the buyer's name, and 25% said a letter that just invited them to the fair didn't motivate them to go to the auction.

10) Is personal contact with a member important? If a member delivered a buyer's letter in person and introduced him or herself, would that help you decide to bid on their animal?

80% said personal contact with a member is not really important, and 20% said it doesn't really matter until the day of the auction.

11) If you have received a buyer's letter from a particular member in the past, does that influence your decision to bid on their animal in the future?

75% said yes it does influence them, and 25% said it depends on how well the letter is written.

Things you should include in your Buyers Letter:

1) Information about yourself

Tell them your name, age, and introduce yourself. This helps the buyer know whose letter they are reading. When they get to the fair it will help them make a connection with you. Some buyers are more likely to bid on animals raised by people they know.

2) Information about your project and club

Some buyers like to hear about your animal, how you raised it, and what club/organization (if any) you belong to. They may choose to bid on your animal based on your club affiliation if they recognize your club from your activities that they have heard about.

3) The fair dates

This helps the buyer because they will know when the fair is and that way they can attend. If they have fun and enjoy themselves, they would be more likely to come back. If they don't know the dates of the fair then they won't know when to come and look at your animals.

4) The sale dates, times and locations

In order for the buyer to bid on your animal they will need to know when the auction is and where it is. If you can't get them to the auction then they can't bid on your animal and you won't sell it as easily.

5) Tell them how they can participate as a buyer

This is important because if they are a first time buyer they can find out what they have to do. Providing potential buyers with all of the necessary information will make it easier for them to participate.

6) Inform them where they can get more information

People sometimes have questions that you haven't answered in your buyer letter. This tells them where they can go to get answers those questions.

7) Thank them for previous participation!

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.

8) Personalize the letters

This is good because most buyers like letters that are signed by a real person and not photocopied letter, and also they like their names on the letter not just Dear Buyer. The more individualized a letter is, the more likely a person is to read it.

9) Consider adding a picture of you and your animal

This can help people see what your animal looks like. Make sure the picture is clear and if you are in it that you look neat and clean.

10) Spell check!

Your letter should be typed (but include a hand-written signature), use proper business letter structure and be proof-read by someone else. Grammar, spelling and punctuation matter!

11) Safety first.

Reminder on personal information: always check with your parents before distributing information about yourself!

10 Tips for a better buyer's letter

Practicing good written communications contributes to a successful project.

As many youth prepare their projects for the fair season, one important aspect of a successful project is a well-written buyer's letter. This piece of communication is a crucial way to convey information to potential customers about your project and the auction, while also making a personal connection. Whether this is your first project auction or you've been doing it for several years, here are some tips to help make your letter stand out.

1. Plan ahead!

- Send out letters well in advance of the auction so that buyers can make plans to come. In general a buyer's letter should go out at least one month before the auction.

2. Personalize it.

- Include a personal greeting to the potential buyer (ex: Dear Mr. Smith, Dear Ms. Jones or Dear Johnson County Farm Bureau.) Sometimes it is more appropriate to address it to a company or business, but make an effort to learn the specific names of people if you can.

3. Tell a story.

- Your letter should include the story of your product/project (how you chose the project, what preparation choices you made, what makes your product/project stand out) as well as information about you, such as your age, how many years you've been in 4-H or what your project is supporting (college, next year's project, etc.). Help the buyer get to know you more by telling them a little bit about yourself. Answer questions such as:

1. What other activities have you done related to your project?
2. What have you learned through your project?
3. What club and community are you a part of?
4. Why would you like buyers to come to the auction?
5. What are your long-term goals?

4. Think of yourself as a business.

- Include information on the "product" you are producing. What are they buying? What can they do with it? Why is it a good idea to buy a 4-H project? What sort of value will this product bring to them?

5. Market your opportunities.

- Invite them to the auction. Clearly state the date, time and location of the auction. Include important details such as parking or admission

What you should not write in a buyers letter:

1.) Asking the buyer to just buy your animal

*This can make you sound selfish and like you didn't put much effort into your letter. You *should* ask the prospective buyer to come to the fair, invite them to the buyer's lunch, look at your animals then consider bidding on them. Don't be too direct or short.

2.) Asking for a donation or sponsorship

*This makes you sound like you are begging for money. Selling your animal is a business transaction with the buyer rewarding you for your hard work. The buyer ends up with quality meat and you end with a financial gain for your effort.

3.) Stating in the letter to "buy my animal or we won't do business with you"

*This is a threat and people don't respond well to threats. Raising your animal, the fair, and selling your animal should be a positive experience that you can learn from. It shouldn't be a case of threatening people to give a certain amount of money.

4.) Asking for a certain price or bid

*This makes you sound greedy. This is a similar mistake to being too blunt and direct or just asking the buyer to buy your animal.

5.) Statements related to your families debt, hardships, etc.

*Family financial problems should be kept to yourself and you should not tell everybody about them. Buyers may feel sorry for you but this sort of personal information is not anyone's business. It does not make you more attractive as somebody the buyer might want to purchase an animal from. Pity is not a positive motivating factor.

6.) Talking about what you are going to use the money for

*This can make you sound like you are forcing the buyer to buy your animal. Buyers want to hear about how good of a job you did, how you worked hard, how much fun you had and how much you learned not what you intend to spend your profits on.

7.) Writing group letters, or including information on more than one exhibitor in a single letter

*This is bad because the letter is supposed to be about *you* and *your animal* not everybody else and their animal.

8.) Don't use a form letter with Dear Buyer, and photocopied signature

* If you do this the letter isn't personal and it makes it sound like you didn't spend any time on the letter at all. Buyers want to reward your effort on the project in addition to receiving a high quality grade of meat (or poultry). Part of the effort you give is the buyer's letters you send them. A poorly written letter or one that shows very little effort does not motivate a buyer to purchase or bid on your animal.