

# Public Feeding of Animals in Petting Zoos and Other Settings



When visitors are allowed to feed exhibit animals, it's up to you to keep the public safe and make sure your animals are getting the right amounts of the right foods.

The most important step is having observant staff who can recognize individual animals and monitor each animal's food intake. Being attentive to guest behavior to make sure they are following your rules for public feeding is also essential.



## THE RIGHT AMOUNTS

Some animals may be better at attracting attention from people than others, so it's important to make sure food is distributed evenly among the animals.



### Tools and approaches that can help include:

- Individual animal feed records with photo IDs of each animal
- Photos or diagrams of the various species that define optimal body condition so staff have a quick visual comparison when monitoring animal weight
- Weighing animals regularly
- Having ways to exclude the more food-aggressive animals when needed, such as using dividers or smaller pens during feeding times, or providing separate feed stations

## THE RIGHT FOODS

Many species require special diets and feeding them other foods may not be good for their health. Be clear about what your public feeding program allows.

### Strategies for an effective program:

- Setting clear policies for those who violate the feeding rules
- Posting signs
- Offering keeper talks and other public outreach



### PRACTICAL TIP



If public feeding of animals is **not** allowed at your facility, remind guests verbally and through signage.

## DRIVE-THROUGH ANIMAL PARKS

Public feeding of animals in drive-through parks can bring even more challenges. Here are some added tips for these situations:

- Offer verbal or written instructions, such as a flyer, at the point of entry to make visitors aware they can only feed the animals facility-provided food.
- Encourage visitors to only offer food in a way that the animals' heads or other body parts do not enter vehicles.
- Have methods in place for staff to observe visitors often enough throughout the drive to intervene if there are problems.



This Animal Care Aid is part of a series developed to provide information about managing animals housed at drive-through parks.

Questions? Email us at [CenterforAnimalWelfare@usda.gov](mailto:CenterforAnimalWelfare@usda.gov)

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