



DRAFT LETTER

Dear Petting Zoo Operator or Animal Exhibitor,

Interacting with animals at petting zoos or other exhibits provides a unique educational experience for the public, particularly children. Most visitors to animal venues, however, are not aware of some of the health risks associated with animal contacts. We ask for your collaboration to ensure that health risks to the public are minimized while allowing a rewarding exposure to animals in your facility.

Animal contact can result in serious infections and injuries if the proper precautions are not employed. Approximately 150 human disease outbreaks from 1996-2010 were associated with visitors to public animal exhibition settings. There continues to be a number of reported illnesses caused by *Salmonella* and *Escherichia coli* O157, among visitors to petting zoos, fairs, and farms. These reports commonly document livestock, such as cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs as sources for infection. However rabbits, reptiles, and other exotic animals should not be overlooked as sources of infections. Animals harboring infectious organisms often do not show signs of illness, but still shed the pathogens and contaminate the environment.

To ensure the health and safety of visitors to your exhibits, staff working with the animals, and of the animals themselves, it is important to implement protection measures. These measures include guidelines on hand-washing, adult supervision of young children, proper animal management, and appropriate petting zoo design. Important tips for making your petting zoo or animal exhibit safe for the public and educational flyers for your venue are provided with this packet.

The education flyers are designed to be posted **1) at the entrance of the petting zoo, 2) at the exit, and 3) at the hand washing facility.**

Please let us know if you have any questions, comments, or concerns.