

You Be the Judge

Beef Cattle Judging

Success in the cattle industry will most likely depend on the ability to make the right decision at the right time. Beef cattle judging is a good way to form this decision-making ability, and it enables you to see the strengths and weaknesses in breeding and market cattle.

Judging forces you to make choices based on sound reasons, and in time you will discover that judging will train your mind to use sound reasoning.

Cattle judging is an art and talent that can only be improved by practice and the desire to want to learn more. It teaches you to study beef cattle so you are familiar with the basic structure of each animal you place in a class. By looking



for both the strengths and weaknesses of individual animals, you form a habit of seeing these same characteristics when solving other problems. There is no substitute for a mind trained to see all sides of a problem.

Judging not only allows you to develop a good eye for cattle, but it also can give you the opportunity to visit some of the most outstanding livestock breeders in America. Livestock judging team competition culminates at the university level. Teams throughout the United States compete several times a year

and many of the team members started out just where you are today; a young person interested in a life in the livestock industry.

MECHANICS OF LIVESTOCK JUDGING

A judging contest will consist of ‘classes’ of livestock. Classes will contain four individually marked animals, and you will decide in what order to place them. When marking your judging card it is imperative that you mark it and make sure it is marked correctly to receive a score. Also, be sure your contestant number, class name and number is on every card. Without this information, you could receive zero points for the class.

When placing a class of livestock keep it simple. Recall what your coach has taught you and keep in mind the ‘big picture.’ For example, do not bottom a heifer because of one fault, if she is the nice balanced, sound structured and big bodied, but perhaps is not the most feminine. Chances are, she will not be placed last due her lack of femininity.

STEPS IN JUDGING A CLASS OF LIVESTOCK

1. Information

You must be totally informed as to the intended use of the animals you are to evaluate, and be aware of relative economic differences among the traits you observe. If performance information or a scenario is available, develop a clear understanding of it. For

example, you might have to compare the values of underfinished and overfinished steers, or structural correctness and growth in a class of bulls.

2. Observation

You must carefully observe each animal and establish how it meets or fails to meet the requirements that have been established as ideal. Be sure to evaluate the animals from every angle and watch the animal travel.

3. Comparison

Each animal must then be compared with all others in the group, establishing differences and similarities.

4. Conclusion

After completion of the first three steps, you must arrive at a logical ranking for the animals as to the relative merit of their use.

REASONS AND NOTE TAKING

A major part of a judging contest is being able to justify your placing with a set of oral reasons. Contestants recite their reasons to a judge explaining why they placed the class the way they did.

The ability to give oral reasons is one of the most valuable skills you will gain from judging. In order to be successful at reasons, they must be organized, accurate, and brief — usually about two minutes. Reasons must be

given with confidence and authority; remember you are confident in your placing and that needs to be expressed throughout your reasons.

It is important when giving reasons that you are able to recall each individual animal in your mind. You should be able to visually picture each animal standing and on the move, however it is important to take good notes to

help with the memory recall.

There are different ways to take notes and your coach will tell you which format to use. Keep in mind that you are taking just NOTES, you are not writing out your reasons. Your notes should be brief, giving you just enough information to enable you to picture the animals in your head.

HERE ARE TWO NOTE FORMAT EXAMPLES:

Angus Heifers		1-2-3-4
Compare 1/2	Grant 2 back to 1	
	Criticize 2	
Compare 2/3	Grant 3 back to 2	
	Criticize 3	
Compare 3/4	Grant 4 back to 3	
	Criticize 4	

Angus Heifers		1-2-3-4
Compare 1/2	Grant 2 back to 1	Criticize 2
Compare 2/3	Grant 3 back to 2	Criticize 3
Compare 3/4	Grant 4 back to 3	Criticize 4

EXAMPLE SET OF REASONS

I placed the Angus heifers 1-2-3-4. In my top pair, I preferred the more powerfully constructed 1 to beat 2. She is a bigger bodied heifer, being more expansive in her upper rib, and she gets progressively deeper from her fore-rib back. She not only spreads more natural width down her top and out of her hip, but she too is stouter featured, being wider chested and stepping down on a bigger foot. As a bonus, she tracks away with more stability to her hock.

There is no question, 2 is more feminine. She is more refined about her head and neater fronted being cleaner through her brisket. She too appears to be more ideal in her body condition. Unfortunately, I left her second as she flattens to her upper rib and tracks in and close at her hocks as she moves away.

Even so, it is still her broodiness that places her over 3 in my intermediate pair. 2 is bigger ribbed, being deeper middled, allowing her to appear to be easier fleshing. Yes, 3 is cleaner fronted and flatter necked, but this does not compensate for the fact that she is tight ribbed and shallow bodied, so she's third.

Still, I can use her advantage in balance to place her over 4 in my final pair. 3 is more refined and extended though her front. She is stronger topped and squarer from hooks to pins. She too is truer in the set to her hocks. Perhaps, 4 is more expansive in her rib and stands on a more massive foot, but in reality she is deep chested, off in her hip and is poor structured being sickle hocked, so she's last.

FIGURING YOUR SCORE

Determining your score on a class can be confusing at first, but gets easier with experience. Each class has a maximum of 50 points. Cuts are used to figure scores and are assigned to the pairs in the class, according to the degree of difficulty the officials see in making those decisions.

If the official is 1-2-3-4, with cuts of 3-6-4, and you placed the class 2-1-3-4, for switching the top pair you would lose 3 points, resulting in a score of 47.

Correct Placing	If not, deduct	In our example
1 over 2	3	0
1 over 3	3+6	0
1 over 4	3+6+4	0
2 over 3	6	0
2 over 4	6+4	10
3 over 4	4	4
		<hr/>
		Total drop: 14
		Final Score 50-14 = 36

The other cut points are applied accordingly to their respective pairs.

That was just an example of a pair switch, let's look at what would happen if you placed the class 1-4-2-3. This placing would be referred to as a bust.

To figure your score, realize that in every class of 4 animals there are six decisions you must make correctly to score 50 points. In this case, the decisions are:

JUDGING MARKET STEERS

One or more classes of market animals will be included in most contests you compete in as a livestock judge. The most important criteria to consider in a market steer class is muscling, finish (fat), balance, structure, rib shape and depth.

Muscle expression should be evaluated down the steer's topline and through his quarter. External fat should be evenly distributed over all areas of the ribcage. The ideal fat thickness should measure between .3 inches and .5 inches at the 12th rib. Other indicators of fat would include the brisket, middle, cod and pin bone areas.

Balance is best evaluated from a side profile by drawing an imaginary line through the center of the steer. The front half of the steer should be equal to the back half. A nicely balanced steer will be straight in its lines, clean about its neck and middle.

A steer should also be structurally sound. If the steer cannot walk then he will not be able to get to the feed bunk to eat and gain weight. Also, if the steer is shallow bodied and flat ribbed, his fleshing ability will be poor.

JUDGING BREEDING CATTLE

Several classes of breeding cattle are included in judging contests. It is important to know how to evaluate them not only for a contest, but also for your personal herd.

Breeding cattle should be evaluated on structure, fleshing ability and muscling. Additionally, females need to be evaluated on femininity and bulls' scrotal size and placement needs to be analyzed.

Structure is a top priority. Bulls and females need to be structurally sound for a natural breeding situation. A bull's hind legs need to be sound for mounting. Females

need to be structurally sound in order to prevent calving complications and enable them to raise a healthy calf.

Breeding cattle also need to be easy fleshing and big bodied. They need to have upper rib shape, be deep bodied and loose flanked. Also, they should be wide based.

Muscling is an important aspect, as well. It is evaluated the same as it is in steers, down the topline and through the quarter.

Females should be feminine about their head, neck and through their front end. Bulls need to have a large scrotum that is correct in it's set. Finally, all breeding cattle need to be well-balanced on the profile.

JUDGING PERFORMANCE CATTLE

Most contests will have one or two classes that use performance records as part of the placing. This may include a scenario of the intended use of the animals, and actual or projected data (EPDs). Performance classes are more objective, and often times more difficult to judge than classes that require only visual appraisal. However, they are more representative of the real-life choices that you will face as a livestock producer. Each performance class will have a management situation.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when judging a performance class:

1. The type and amount of feed resources available. An example would be in a limited feed situation, the producer would want easy fleshing cattle that require less feed.
2. When judging bulls, the size, age and breed of the cows the bulls will be used on is important. An example is that low birth weight bulls should be used on heifers, since heifers are more apt to have

difficulty when calving for the first time.

3. Labor availability or management capabilities is important. For example, if labor is low, then calving ease should be considered.
4. The method and time in which the progeny will be utilized or marketed. If all calves are sold at weaning, then the bull's own weaning weight and weaning weight EPD is important. The higher the number the better, because that would mean the bull was a fast gainer and therefore his calves would weigh more at selling and result in greater

profits. However, if calves are retained and fed until they are finished, then yearling weight, average daily gain and carcass traits become important.

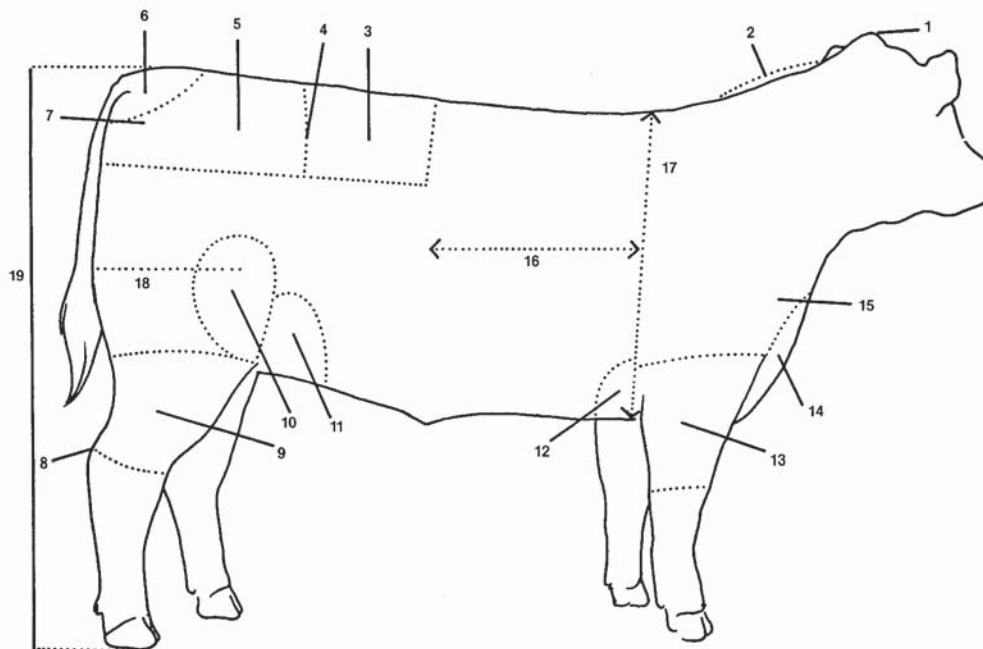
When judging the class you should:

1. Understand the class description, situation or scenario
2. Set priorities according to the class description
3. Evaluate visual traits
4. Evaluate the performance records
5. Decide on the final placing

Values of Livestock Judging

- + Trains the students to evaluate traits of economic importance and consequently make more logical decisions on genetic selection.
- + Educates students to accurately describe and compare animals with proper and accepted livestock terminology.
- + Requires students to establish and defend their conclusions.
- + Provides a form of competition that stimulates interest in the livestock industry.
- + Rewards students for study and preparation.
- + Builds personal confidence.
- + Improves the power of observation and develops memory.
- + Teaches students how to present themselves and their ideas.
- + Teaches students to be persuasive and convincing.
- + Builds interest in production, trends and opportunities in the livestock industry.

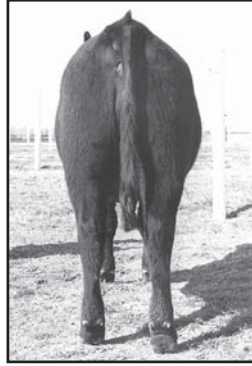
Parts of Cattle



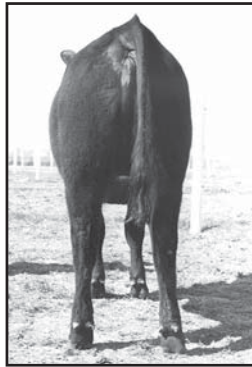
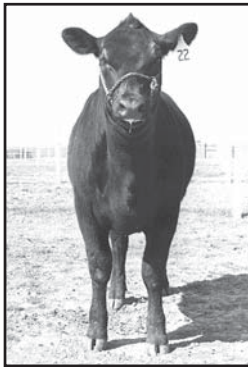
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|--------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 Poll | 8 Hock | 15 Point of Shoulder |
| 2 Crest | 9 Hind Shank | 16 Ribs |
| 3 Loin | 10 Stifle | 17 Heart Girth or Depth of Chest |
| 4 Hook or Hip Bone | 11 Rear Flank | 18 Length of Rump |
| 5 Rump | 12 Fore Flank | 19 Height at Hip |
| 6 Tail Head | 13 Fore Shank | |
| 7 Pin Bone | 14 Brisket | |

Class of Angus Heifers

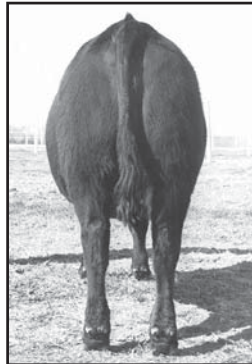
1



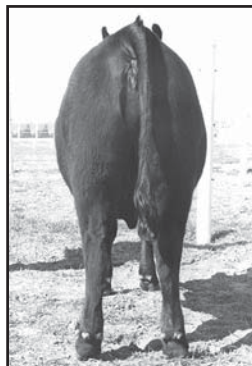
2



3



4



As you analyze these four heifers, you should be able to divide the class into two logical pairs. Heifers 3 and 4 are bigger bodied and wider constructed than 1 and 2. 3 appears to be sounder structured, standing squarer up front and from the rear. 4 is more feminine through her front and appears to be more ideal in her body condition. In the bottom pair, 2 is wider chested and has more rib shape. She too appears to be more correct in the set to her hock. 1 does stand squarer on her front legs, but she has the least rib shape. The official placing for this class is 3-4-2-1 with cuts of 2-4-3.

Class of Performance Angus Bulls

1



Birth Weight		Weaning Weight		Maternal Milk		Comb	Yearling Weight	
EPD	ACC	EPD	ACC	EPD	ACC	Value	EPD	ACC
+2.8	.37	+36	.35	+10	.32	+26	+67	.31

2



Birth Weight		Weaning Weight		Maternal Milk		Comb	Yearling Weight	
EPD	ACC	EPD	ACC	EPD	ACC	Value	EPD	ACC
+3.1	.41	+40	.37	+16	.37	+36	+77	.31

3



Birth Weight		Weaning Weight		Maternal Milk		Comb	Yearling Weight	
EPD	ACC	EPD	ACC	EPD	ACC	Value	EPD	ACC
-0.2	.42	+28	.41	+15	.22	+29	+59	.26

4



Birth Weight		Weaning Weight		Maternal Milk		Comb	Yearling Weight	
EPD	ACC	EPD	ACC	EPD	ACC	Value	EPD	ACC
+6.9	.38	+34	.34	+4	.28	+21	+64	.32

Scenario: Select these bulls as they are to be mated to heifers and mature cows in a purebred operation. This operation profits primarily through the sale of yearling bulls to commercial producers. Each year they retain the top 50% of heifers as replacements. Feed and labor resources are average.

As you analyze these four bulls phenotypically, you should be able to divide the class into two logical pairs. Bulls 1 and 2 are nicer balanced and heavier muscles. Bull 3 is nice balanced, but he is tight ribbed and coarse fronted. Bull 4 does appear to have some muscle, but is steep out of his hip and straight legged. Now in the top pair, bull 2's data suggests he could produce commercial bulls who would inject more growth into their herds and his daughters should be heavier milkers, than bull 1. In the bottom pair, 3 is definitely a better sire to be bred to heifers due to his lower birth weight. Bull 3's daughters also should be heavier milkers. Bull 4 is extreme is his birth weight and low in his milk. With all this in mind the official placing on this class is 2-1-3-4 with cuts of 2-5-4.