

Stepping Up to the Plate

NJAS carcass contest showcases big-league results.

by Jordan Lamb, Angus Communications intern

A staple of the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) lineup, the carcass contest gives juniors the chance to step up to the plate and showcase the full potential of their cattle. Zoe Gurley of Sarcoxie, Mo., did just that in Louisville, taking a big swing with four steers entered and scored three in the top seven.

The accomplishment capped off a successful week for Gurley and highlighted the consistency of her breeding and management program. She rounded out the contest by earning Reserve Champion Carcass Steer, Grand Champion Bred-and-Owned (B&O) Carcass Steer, Reserve Champion B&O Carcass Steer and a second-place finish in the State Carcass Group competition.

"It was exciting and rewarding," Gurley says, taking a moment to reflect on when her name was announced as a winner. "It made all the hard work feel worth it."

Gurley's involvement in the carcass

contest began with a desire to better understand the end product of the cattle she raises.

"I wanted to see how the cattle I raised performed on the rail and learn more about producing quality beef," she explains.

That commitment to learning paid off in a big way. Entering four steers that were B&O, she placed three of the four among the top seven entries in the contest, an achievement that reflects years of selection and management decisions made at home.

"It shows that our breeding program is producing consistent, high-quality cattle, and that the work we put in every day pays off," she says.

The Missouri junior encourages other young producers to take part in the contest, even if they're new to the experience.

"It teaches you a lot about the beef industry beyond the show ring,"



Winning the carcass contest are Owen Austrino, Dade City, Fla., Grand Champion Carcass (middle); and Zoe Gurley, Sarcoxie, Mo., Reserve Grand Champion Carcass (right). Gurley also took home Grand and Reserve Grand Champion B&O Carcass honors. Pictured presenting is Curtis Long, Butler, Mo.

Gurley says. "My advice is to ask questions and learn from others."

Beyond the awards and recognition, she believes the skills gained through the carcass contest will continue to benefit her in the future.

2026 CARCASS CONTEST State Group Results

RANK	TEAM	NAME	PREM. (\$/HD.)	STATE AVG.
1	MISSOURI 1	Davis Ward	\$297.85	
1	MISSOURI 1	Connelly Ward	\$271.44	\$232.22
1	MISSOURI 1	Burton Hulse	\$127.36	
2	MISSOURI 2	Zoe Gurley	\$200.64	
2	MISSOURI 2	Kassidie Eagleburger	\$146.87	\$159.36
2	MISSOURI 2	Charles Goodnight	\$130.56	



“They’ve taught me responsibility, problem-solving, and how to make decisions that will help me in the cattle industry and beyond,” she shares.

As the beef industry continues to evolve, opportunities like the NJAS carcass contest help prepare the next generation of cattle producers by connecting everyday management decisions to real-world performance.

For this Missouri junior, the contest not only showcased the strength of her breeding program, but also reinforced the value of hard work, consistency and a willingness to learn.

Beyond the show ring

The NJAS Carcass Contest is designed to educate young cattle producers on the principles of efficiently feeding and managing steers to produce high-quality carcasses and, ultimately, an exceptional eating experience for consumers. Contest participants either raise or purchase a steer, carefully considering the animal’s genetic potential for desirable carcass characteristics.

After feeding the steer to market weight at home, exhibitors bring their animals to NJAS, where the steers are weighed and tagged before being transported to a regional processing facility.

There, the carcasses are evaluated and graded according to industry standards, providing valuable insight into the relationship between genetics, management practices and carcass quality.

Along with the hands-on experience of taking a steer from start to finish, Gurley and the rest of the 13 National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members who participated received detailed data about their steers. This data allows exhibitors to evaluate decisions made leading up to the contest and to help them better succeed in future years.

Out of the 16 steers entered in the contest, eight met the specifications for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB) brand. Five of those graded CAB Prime; all carcasses graded Choice or better and received at minimum a \$14-per-hundredweight (cwt.) grid premium. The highest premium paid

out was \$36 per cwt.

Contestants received cash premiums above the market price paid by the processor through the Angus Foundation’s Briarwood Angus Farms Carcass Steer Contest Awards Endowment Fund. Established by Curtis Long and the late Ann Long, the endowment funds carcass contest awards and premiums, including an additional 25% premium for carcasses meeting CAB specifications. 



2026 CARCASS CONTEST Results

INDIVIDUAL RESULTS	NAME	STATE GROUP	LIVE WT. (LB.)	DRESSING %	HCW (LB.)	FAT (IN.)	REA (SQ. IN.)	MARB SCORE	QG	YG	CAB®	GRID PRE. (\$/CWT.)	CARCASS PREM. (\$/HD.)
1	Owen Austrino	---	1,480	61.2%	906	0.60	15.5	MAB50	PRO	2.8	YES	\$36.00	\$326.16
2	Zoe Gurley	---	1,405	64.4%	905	0.55	15.1	SLAB20	PR-	2.8	YES	\$36.00	\$325.80
3	William Rister	---	1,460	61.9%	904	0.65	15.9	SLAB30	PR-	2.8	YES	\$36.00	\$325.44
4	Davis Ward	MO 1	1,270	63.4%	805	0.50	15.2	SLAB40	PR-	2.3	YES	\$37.00	\$297.85
5	Connelly Ward	MO 1	1,185	63.6%	754	0.40	12.5	MAB20	PRO	2.8	YES	\$36.00	\$271.44
6	Zoe Gurley	MO 2	1,432	63.7%	912	0.60	12.6	MT80	CHO	3.8	YES	\$22.00	\$200.64
7	Zoe Gurley	---	1,400	64.6%	904	0.70	13.2	MD20	CH+	3.8	YES	\$22.00	\$198.88
8	Reegan Houk	---	1,315	60.8%	800	0.50	14.8	SM80	CH-	2.4	NO	\$19.00	\$152.00
9	Kassidie Eagleburger	MO 2	1,240	62.3%	773	0.45	14.3	SM70	CH-	2.3	NO	\$19.00	\$146.87
10	Bristol Lovett	---	1,337	66.0%	882	0.60	14.2	SM60	CH-	3.2	NO	\$16.00	\$141.12