Judging Beef Cattle and Oral Reasons 101

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Photos by Cindy A. Kinder

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Overview

This booklet will help youth and beginning producers to understand the five basic criteria for selecting a beef animal. It will also help beginners in 4-H and FFA livestock judging to understand proper note-taking format and the structure to oral reasons.

It should be used by youth and adults together, at club meetings, in classrooms, at field days, or at workshops as a livestock judging reference. As judgers gain more experience, they can build their note-taking and oral-reasons skills by attending regional judging camps or clinics.

Life skills

4-H livestock judging programs help youth develop life skills that make them better leaders and citizens and build stronger communities.

- **Leadership**
- **Teamwork**
- **Self-motivation**
- **Marketable skills**
- **Critical thinking**
- **Problem solving**
- **Decision making**
- **Communication**
- **Self-esteem**
- **Character**
- **Self-responsibility**

Parts of a beef animal

Knowing the parts of an animal will help you understand what someone is saying about an animal. It will also help you give correct information about your animal to someone, a veterinarian, for example. Study the parts of the beef animal below. Once you know them, study the next animal that associates specific terms with those parts.

A.	Tail head	**H.**	Muzzle	**O.**	Knee	**V.**	Pastern
B.	Hip	**I.**	Throat	**P.**	Cannon bone	**W.**	Dew claw
C.	Rump	**J.**	Dewlap	**Q.**	Hoof	**X.**	Hock
D.	Loin	**K.**	Point of shoulder	**R.**	Elbow	**Y.**	Switch
E.	Back	**L.**	Shoulder	**S.**	Navel or sheath	**Z.**	Round
F.	Crest	**M.**	Brisket	**T.**	Rear flank	**AA.**	Pin
G.	Poll	**N.**	Forearm	**U.**	Stifle joint	**BB.**	Rib

Terms associated with a beef animal

Knowing the parts of an animal is important, and so is knowing the terms that are associated with those parts. You can build confidence and portray competence when you talk the same terminology as other producers.

A. Top or topline

B. Hooks to pins; level hipped

C. Depth of flank

D. Hip height; framed

E. Cod/Udder region

F. Length of body

G. Deeper bodied; deeper middled

H. Heart girth

I. Spring of rib; rib cage

J. Long fronted; thin necked

K. Width of chest floor; wider tracking

Selecting a beef animal

Selecting the right beef animals for your operation is important. Whether you have a small or large operation or just one animal, having the wrong animal can cost you money. Besides the industry goals listed in the box, there are five main criteria to consider when selecting beef cattle: (1) growth and frame or skeletal size, (2) muscling, (3) volume, performance, (4) condition, trimness, and (5) structure, soundness, balance.

MARKET BEEF INDUSTRY GOALS

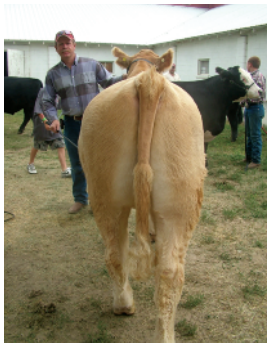
Age at market: 14–18 months
Live weight: 1250–1400 pounds
Hot carcass weight: 700–900 pounds
Kidney, pelvic, and heart fat (KPH): 3.0 or less
Fat thickness: 0.5 inch or less
Ribeye: 12.5–14.5 square inches
Quality grade: Choice or higher
Yield grade: 3.0 or less

Growth and frame or skeletal size

The beef industry has ideal final live weights of 1250–1400 pounds and carcass weights of 700–900 pounds. Market-ready animals that are too small (less than 1000 lb) cost the industry more per pound to process. Those that are too large (1500 lb) are too big for processing facilities, and their cuts of meat are too large for consumers. Indicators of size are length of body, height at the hip, and length and size of the cannon bone.

Discussion Questions

Identify the steers with large, medium, or small frames as measured by hip height. (Find hip height on the illustration showing terms associated with a beef animal, page 4.)

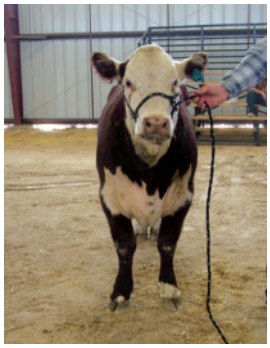


Muscling

Muscling is important to the meat industry. Heavy-muscled animals produce more meat and less fat. Consumers are very conscious of fat and prefer beef with less fat. You can see indications of muscling in the round, in the width of stance, and over an animal's back.

Discussion Questions

Look at the side and rear views of these two steers. Which steer is light muscled and which is medium muscled? (Answer: Black steer is light muscled.)



Volume, performance

The volume, or capacity, of an animal indicates how well the animal may perform. You want a deep-bodied animal that can consume large amounts of feed to allow it to grow and reach market weight or maturity faster. Indicators of capacity and performance are ribcage length, depth, and shape (spring); depth of the flank; and width of the chest floor.

Discussion Questions

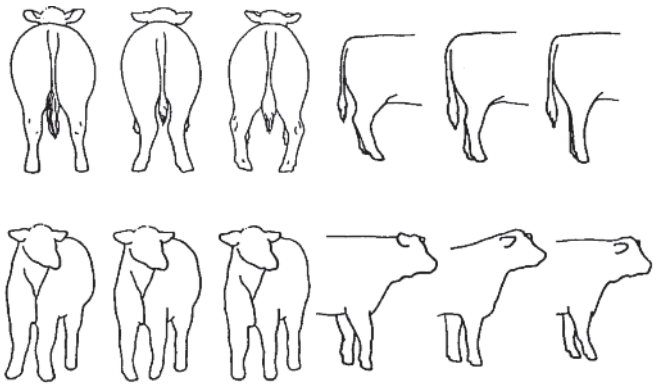
Compare the volume of the two Shorthorn animals (top). Then compare the widths of the chest floors of the Hereford and Angus animals (bottom).

Condition, trimness

The amount of trimness and condition (fat) an animal has also relates to its performance. Depending on the type of animal you have (market or breeding) you want an animal that is not too fat or too thin. You can see indications of fat in the brisket, over the ribs, in the flank, on the pin bones, and in the cod/udder region.

Discussion Questions

Look at the two steers; can you see differences in condition? (Blue steer is heavier conditioned.)



Source: Ohio State University Extension, outreach arm of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.

Structure, soundness, balance

Strong bone and correct skeletal structure is essential for any animal traveling to feed and water. You can observe structure in the angle of the shoulder, the levelness of top line and hip, the pastern angle, and in the animal's movement. Balance is the overall attractiveness of the animal. Animals should be evenly balanced from the front to the rear.

Discussion Questions

Find the correct front leg and rear leg structures in this illustration.

Judging beef cattle

Note taking

Presenting oral reasons is the most valuable experience you will have in livestock judging. It helps you to think and state your thoughts clearly. It also demonstrates your knowledge and vocabulary. Being able to defend a decision builds your confidence and self-esteem. No matter what career you choose, communicating effectively is a must to be successful. Success in judging starts with note taking.

During contests, you will judge several different classes in a short time and give your oral reasons later. You will need to take notes on what you see about the animals in each class. You will then study the notes before giving oral reasons to a judge. A good set of notes should help you remember the class in your mind.

You will take notes only on classes that have been assigned as reasons classes. Once you have evaluated and placed the animals in the class, then take notes. A 5- by 8-inch steno notebook is suggested for use in taking notes.

This is what a blank note page should look like. Leave enough space in each box for your notes.

Class Name: **Class Placing:**

Introduction:

# and ID	Grant (Good)	Criticize (Bad)	Compare (Good)
# and ID	Grant (Good)	Criticize (Bad)	Compare (Good)
# and ID	Grant (Good)	Criticize (Bad)	Compare (Good)
# and ID	Grant (Good)	Criticize (Bad)	Compare (Good)

Note-taking format

The format for notes is broken down into rows:

- THE FIRST ROW and heading is the introduction to the class. It tells what you judged (Angus heifers, for example) and how you placed the class (4-1-3-2, for example). The introduction also explains how easy or hard it was to place the class of animals.
- THE SECOND ROW explains why the 1st place animal is over the 2nd place animal.
- THE THIRD ROW explains why the 2nd place animal is over the 3rd place animal.
- THE FOURTH ROW explains why the 3rd place animal is over the 4th place animal.
- THE FINAL ROW explains why the last animal is last and is the conclusion of the reasons.

Each row after the first has four columns:

- NUMBER AND IDENTIFICATION—Animals are numbered 1 through 4, and an identification point is used to describe individual animals in the class.
- GRANT–Give an overall big picture of an animal by stating a good quality of the animal in that row. Sometimes there may be no grant for an animal.
- CRITICIZE–List 1 or 2 bad qualities of the animal in that row. Sometimes there may be no criticism.
- COMPARE–List two or three good qualities of the animal in that row, stating why it placed over the next animal.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE NOTE TAKING AND REASONS

1. Don't start taking notes until you have placed the class and marked your card.
2. Write your notes in the format below in order to help you give a fluid, organized set of reasons.
3. Try to be general in the terms that you use to describe the animal in each box, but write as much as possible to describe the animal. You will have time to use "terms" when you prepare to deliver your oral reasons.
4. Keep your notes readable and brief; this will prevent you from memorizing your notes. You should be able to remember the animals, not your notes.
5. Don't forget to write down an ID point and sex, if needed, for each animal.
6. Be sure to use the correct sex of the animal in classes that are of mixed sex and use your ID points when describing the animals.
7. Use the time during non-reasons classes to look back at your notes and prepare your reasons or complete your notes.

This is how you would fill in your note page.

Class Name: **Class Placing:**

Say how easy or hard it was to place the class. State overall comment about outstanding individual animal or top pair of animals.

Animal # and list one ID.	Say why 1st place animal wins the class.	Say any bad qualities of the 1st place animal (optional).	Say why 1st place animal beats 2nd place animal by saying the good qualities of 1st place animal.
Animal # and list one ID.	Say one overall good quality of the 2nd place animal.	Say any bad qualities of the 2nd place animal.	Say why 2nd place animal beats 3rd place animal by saying the good qualities of 2nd place animal.
Animal # and list one ID.	Say one overall good quality of the 3rd place animal.	Say any bad qualities of the 3rd place animal.	Say why 3rd place animal beats 4th place animal by saying the good qualities of 3rd place animal.
Animal # and list one ID.	Say one overall good quality of the 4th place animal.	Say any bad qualities of the 4th place animal.	Thank you

Using your notes to prepare oral reasons

Here is an example set of notes. They are color-coded to show you the transfer of information from your notes to your oral reasons.

Class Name: Senior Yearling Angus Heifers **Class Placing:** 4–1–3–2

Easily started, highest quality

4 Show halter	Highest quality	No obvious criticism	Nicely balanced Soundest moving/structure More feminine Longer strided
1 Red tag	Most like class winner from rib and muscle standpoint	Coarse and straight shouldered Roaches in top when on the move	Wider chested Bolder ribbed Shape to top and hip Deeper rib/flank
3 Yellow tag	Longer fronted Leveler hipped More attractive Strong topped	Shallowest bodied Narrowest chested Also straight shouldered	Higher quality Longer, thinner necked, flatter shouldered, more parallel in her lines Heavier muscled
2 No tag	Deepest bodied and easiest fleshing	Lowest quality, poorest balanced, flattest ribbed	Thank you

Using these notes, here is an example set of reasons:

The words that are highlighted in green are transition phrases that are to be used in every set of reasons. These transition phrases help you move from box to box in your notes.

I placed the Senior Yearling Angus Heifers 4132. In an easy placing I started with the highest quality, angus heifer. When compared to 1, the heifer with the show halter is nicer balanced, more feminine fronted, and sounder structured. She is longer strided on the walk.

1 is the most like the class winner from a standpoint of rib and muscle. But the red tag heifer is coarse and straight shouldered, and she roaches in her top when on the move. So she's second.

In a closer middle pair of heifers I used 1. She is a wider chested, bolder ribbed heifer that has more shape to her top and hip. Plus, she's deeper in her rib and flank.

The yellow tagged heifer is longer fronted, leveler hipped, and more attractive from the side. However, she is the shallowest-bodied, narrowest-chested heifer and also too straight in her shoulder. She's third.

Quality places 3 over 2 in the bottom pair. She is longer and thinner necked and flatter shouldered. She is stronger topped and more parallel in her lines and heavier muscled.

The heifer with no tag is the deepest bodied and the easiest fleshing, but she is the lowest-quality, poorest-balanced, flattest-ribbed heifer in class. So I left her last. Thank you.

Terms and transitions in oral reasons

Use the "est," superlative form, of a word when talking about an individual animal that is the best of a group. Use the "er" superlative of a word when comparing two animals. The terms below are grouped by criteria you would use in placing a class.

Growth and frame, skeletal size

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Larger framed	Smaller framed
Larger, growthier	Tall, narrow
More youthful appearing	Earlier maturing

Muscle—Heifers

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Bigger hipped	Narrows from hooks to pins
Bigger topped	Narrow based
Heavier muscled	Light muscled
Wider based	Flat, narrow made

Muscle—Steers and bulls

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Bigger topped	Narrow topped
Bigger hipped	Least shape to his top
Wider from stifle to stifle	Flat quartered
Squarer, more muscular top	Narrow based
More shape and dimension of muscle	Flat stifled

Volume, performance

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Deeper bodied	Flat ribbed
More spring of rib	Hardest doing
Easiest fleshing	Narrow chested
Wider chested	Shallow, tight ribbed
Higher volumed	

Trimness, condition

Good quality	*Bad quality*
More correctly finished steer	Too fat
More desirable degree of condition	Less condition
Trimmer through (brisket, flank)	Wastier

Structure, soundness, balance

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Sounder moving	Roaches in top
Wider tracking	Straight shouldered
More correct on feet and legs	Tight moving
Truer tracking	Most structurally incorrect
Easy moving	Tight hipped
Smooth shoulder	
Level topline	
Level hip	

continued on page 11

Femininity

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Most attractive	Deep fronted
Highest quality	Plain made
Long fronted	Bold and coarse shouldered
Thin necked or feminine necked	Wasty fronted
Smooth shouldered	Thick and coarse fronted

Carcass

Good quality	*Bad quality*
Highest cutability	Lowest cutability
Best combination of quality and yield	Least desirable yield grade
Most apt to grade choice	Least apt to grade choice
Most market ready	Least market ready
	Patchy finished

Transition terms

Use these words to help with the flow of your reasons.

Grants

I realize
I admit
I agree
I saw

Transitional terms

Plus
Besides
Also

Action words

Exhibited
Displayed
Showed
Presented

Opening pairs

Coming to the bottom pair
Moving to
In closing I preferred to
In the top pair

Oral reasons worksheet

Use this worksheet to practice moving your notes into reasons.

I placed the _____ _____

Identify class — Placing

Say how easy or hard it is to place the class

# and ID	Grant	Criticize (est)	Compare (er)
	I started with a(an) _____ (top pair) (outstanding individual) _____ _____	I realize (*Optional: only if class winner has obvious disadvantages*) _____ _____ _____	But in the top pair I placed _____ over _____because _____ _____
	There is no question _____ is the (*What is the second place animal's class advantage?*) _____ _____	But when compared to the class winner _____ _____ _____ he/she is second.	Still in the middle pair I used his/her advantage in _____ _____ to place over (3rd). _____ _____
	I realize that _____ is _____ _____ _____	But I placed him third because _____ _____ _____ _____	In the bottom pair it is a difficult/easy decision to place _____ over _____
	I admit _____is a _____ _____ _____	However_____is the lightest, smallest, poorest, etc . . . so he/she is 4th.	Thank you.