Livestock Judging Guide

By
Neal Smith
Extension Area Specialist – 4-H
Module 2: Beef Cattle

Judging Breeding Heifers
Will Evaluate:

- Breeding Heifers
- Market Steers

Do Not Judge Bulls at Regional 4-H Contest

Learn Terms To Use:

- When judging breeding cattle
- When judging market animals
Evaluating Breeding Cattle

Ideal breeding heifers or bulls should:

- Be well balanced
- Have ample size and scale
- Show meat-type characteristics
- Have sound feet and legs
- Exhibit proper breed and sex character
- Display adequate reproductive organs
Ideal Beef Heifer

Feminine head

Angular through neck & shoulders

Neat, smooth shoulder

Bold spring of rib

Long bodied

Long stifle

Deep rear flank

Deep ribbed

Long, level rump

Neat tailhead

Neat throat, dewlap & brisket

Deep, long muscled rear quarter
Ideal Beef Heifer

- Long, smooth muscled rear quarter
- Correct set of hocks
- Legs set wide apart
- Natural thickness down back & loin
- Long bodied
- Well balanced
- Smooth shoulder
- Deep, wide chest floor
- Correct set of feet and legs
Judging Heifers

- Begin at the Ground & Work UP
- Start at the Rear and Work Forward
- Rank Animals Based On:
  - Traits of importance they possess
  - Evaluate most important traits first
- Contestants should:
  - Eliminate any easy placings
  - Place the remainder based on the volume of the important traits
Judging Heifers

- Ranking of Traits in the Order of Importance:
  - Soundness & structural correctness
  - Capacity or volume
  - Style and balance
  - Degree of muscling
  - Femininity
Judging Heifers

Soundness and Structural Correctness

- Feet, legs and connected structure
  - Biggest factors physically affecting longevity
- Start evaluation:
  - At the ground
  - Work up a joint at a time
- Carefully consider
  - Feet
  - Pasterns
  - Hocks
  - Rump
  - Knees
  - Shoulders
Judging Heifers

- **Feet** should be:
  - Big
  - Even-toed
  - Squarely placed
  - Toes pointing straight forward
Judging Heifers

Splay-footed

Feet turned out and not squarely under heifer. Puts stress on inside toes and inside of the knees.

Poor depth of heel

Feet with poor depth of heel. Hoof-skin junction sets too close to the ground.
Judging Heifers

 Pasterns should be:
   Strong and flexible
   Allows cushion and give in foot & ankle

 Straight pasterns:
   Restrict flex

 Weak pasterns:
   Too much set or angle
   Adds pressure on joints

Correct set to the pasterns
Judging Heifers

Pastern has too much set, limiting depth of heel and adding pressure to the ankle.

Pastern is too straight, lacking flex and cushion.
Judging Heifers

- **Hocks** should be:
  - Constructed of a clean, flat bone
  - With a slight degree of set
  - Allowing for maximum:
    - Power
    - Mobility

Correct set to the hocks
Judging Heifers

- **Post-legged**
  - Hock is too straight, severely limits flexibility and puts stress on the joint.

- **Sickle-hocked**
  - Too much set to the hock, forces rear feet too far under the heifer adding pressure to hip and rump.

- **Cow-hocked**
  - Hocks turn in, does not provide good balance of weight, and places stress on inside toes and ankles.
Correct rump structure should be:
- Level from hooks to pin bone
- Essential for length of stride

Correct rump structure

Rump structure too steep
Judging Heifers

- **Shoulder** set and shape:
  - Control degree of motion in front end
  - Allows for flexibility
- Determine correct shoulder angle:
  - View cattle on the move
  - Pay attention to length of stride
  - Rear foot should step in track made by front foot

Nice set and smoothness of shoulder
Judging Heifers

Poor set or angle of shoulder, too straight, will restrict stride

Shoulder too course, does not lay smooth
Evaluating Capacity or Volume

- Amount of body volume a heifer possesses
- Necessary to perform at a high level
- And, still maintain body condition

Associated with:
- Production traits
- Performance traits
Evaluating Capacity or Volume
Determined by:
- Body width (spring of rib)
- Body depth
- Body length
Heifers should be:
- Wide bodied
- Good spring of rib
Depth should be:
- Uniform from front to back
- More than 50% of heifer’s height from top of back to ground
Judging Heifers

Lacks adequate capacity

Very narrow bodied, with no spring of rib

Too short bodied

Lacks depth, especially in rear flank
Evaluating Degree of Muscling

- Degree of muscling in heifers should be evaluated:
  - First through center of the quarter
  - Base width of rear feet as heifer walks
  - Shape over heifer’s top
- Critical to compare base width at the ground to top width
- On a lean animal that is heavy muscled:
  - Base width and top width will be equal
Evaluating Degree of Muscling

Fat can cause mistakes in evaluating muscle shape

Fat can:
- Mask shape
- Change shape
- Hide shape
- Invent shape
Judging Heifers

Light muscled

Average muscled

Heavy muscled

Very narrow

Average width

Good width
Evaluating Femininity

Femininity refers to the “prettiness” of the heifer

Traits to consider:

- Refinement of head
- Length of neck
- Angularity of neck & shoulder
- Blending of shoulder to forerib
Judging Heifers

- Too much shoulder
- Excess hide in dewlap
- Coarse head
- Too thick thru neck & shoulder
Test Your Skills

Place this class of heifers
Official Placing:

Official Placing:  1 – 4 – 2 – 3
Cuts:  5 – 2 – 5