Livestock Judging Guide

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Module 2: Beef Cattle

Judging Breeding Heifers
Judging Beef Cattle

- 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
Judging Beef Cattle

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
- Neat throat, dewlap & brisket
- Neat, smooth shoulder
- Angular through neck & shoulders
- Strong topline
- Bold spring of rib
- Long bodied
- Deep ribbed
- Long stifle
- Deep rear flank
- Neat tailhead
- Long, level rump
- 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
- Smooth shoulder
- Deep, wide chest floor
- Correct set of feet and legs
- Long bodied Well balanced
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
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
Judging Heifers

- 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
Judging Heifers

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

Too short bodied

Very narrow bodied, with no spring of rib

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
Very narrow

Average muscled
Average width

Heavy muscled
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
Judging Heifers

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

Place this class of heifers
Official Placing:

1st
2nd
3rd
4th

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