

The Rump (view directly from behind)

A desirable steer is thick when viewed from the rear. This indicates good muscling. The muscles covering the rear should be curved and rounded. If the steer has a flat, square rump, it cannot be full of muscle because muscles are not square and rectangular. It must be fat.

Thickness is desirable low in the stifle area. The steer should be thicker through the stifle area than anywhere else. Very little fat is ever laid down on the outside of the stifle region. If the steer is thick here we know it must be full of meat.

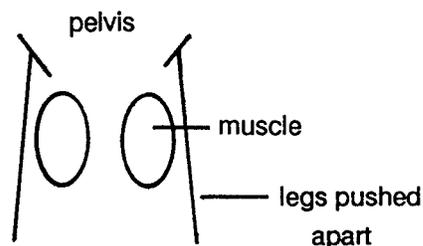
We can observe most about the amount of muscling on the steer by looking directly from behind. Look at the placement of the hind legs. Does the steer stand wide on his hind legs? The hind legs are attached way up in the hip area. If there is lots of meat through this area, the legs will be pushed apart and the steer will stand wide. The hind end contains the high priced cuts. An animal with a wide leg stance, indicating superior muscling in this area, will yield lots of red meat from the rump.



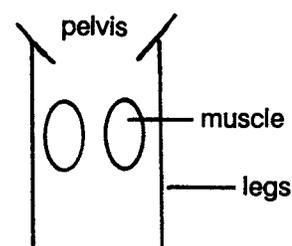
Ideal Steer Rump



Narrow Steer Rump



Pelvis Tilted



Pelvis Straight

Once you have viewed the animal at a distance and evaluated five areas, move in for a closer look. There are points on the steer that contain no muscle or meat, just bone and hide, and... if the animal is finished, a certain amount of fat.

The easiest place to determine the finish of the steer is over the ribs. Feel the ribs about half way down. There should be about 1 cm of fat between the hide and the bone.

Feel the shoulder blade, for there is no muscle here either. There should be only a thin covering of fat over the bone. Handle the steer with the flat surfaces of your fingers or your whole hand, not just your finger tips. The tips of your fingers tickle the animal and make it prone to kick or fidget.



In the show ring, market animals are also evaluated on the way they walk, style and eye appeal, shape of the head, etc. Remember that these things do not affect the quality of meat so don't place more importance on these points than you do on muscling and fat. When placing your class of steers, consider the most important things first - muscle, fat and finish. Then consider the less important characteristics.

The Ideal Steer	
From the front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stands wide and shows trimness in the brisket and neck.
From the rear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The top is rounded with the widest point through the stifle. • The legs stand wide apart and the twist shows evidence of muscle development.
From the side	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The brisket and neck are trim, the topline is long and legs are straight and the flank and middle are trim. • Assess the size and scale of the animal. • Remember to look at the cannon bone for an indication of size of bone and skeleton.

A steer should be sound, alert, healthy, and move without any hindrances. Remember, he has to be able to make it from his bed to his trough and then to the slaughterhouse!

Judging Breeding Animals

There is more to judging the breeding animal than just evaluating muscle and fat. The breeding animal must be able to last substantially longer than the market steer. Structure and conformation are important. The better the conformation of a cow or bull, the greater the chance that their offspring will also have good conformation.

We want our males and females to consistently produce calves that will:

- produce more quality calves, or
- go to the slaughterhouse and return maximum profit.

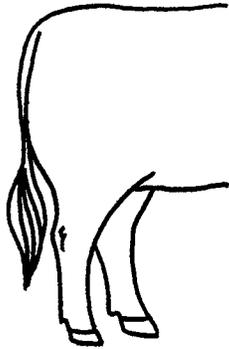
The market animal must make it from the calving pen to the feedlot in about a year. A breeding animal must last for many years, withstanding harsh winters, flies, calving, breeding and foraging. Therefore, structure and soundness are very important considerations when selecting breeding stock.

If you are in the purebred industry, you want animals that meet the breed specifications. Breed character and type are also extremely important. Consult breed associations for more information on breed types either by contacting them or checking their web-sites.

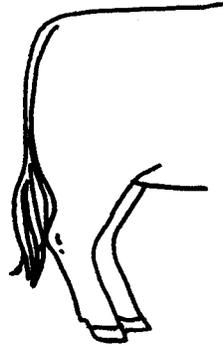
How do you look for these things? It is harder than predicting how a steer will grade but we'll give you a few hints. Remember - all those things that you looked for in a steer are still important because breeding stock must produce those steers. Your breeding stock should have exceptional muscling characteristics just like in a steer. So, all that time and energy spent learning about the market animal has not gone to waste! First, let's look at the ideal breeding animal.

Feet and Legs

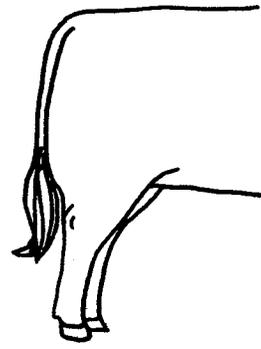
The legs should be set squarely underneath the animal. They should be widely placed and straight when viewed from in front and behind. They should not be bow legged or cow hocked. The hooves should be solid and healthy with no cracks or lesions, and should not be long in the toe. The dew claws should also be short and without any curl. The pastern should be strong yet flexible and should be at a reasonable angle. When viewed from the side, the hock should have the correct set (degree of angulation). Rear legs should be constructed of clean flat bones and the hocks should be free from swelling.



Correct Rear Side



Sickle Hocked



Post Legged



Correct Rear



Bow Legged



Cow Hocked



Rear Leg Correct Pastern



Rear Leg Weak Pastern



Correct Pastern Straight Front Leg



Straight Front Leg Weak Pastern



Back at the Knee



Buck Kneed

General Appearance

The animal should be healthy and alert, moving freely and easily. The desirable head has good distance between the eyes and a wide muzzle. The shoulder should be smooth and the body parts blended well.

The bull should have more muscle definition than the cow or heifer and his muscles should bunch or ripple when he walks. Remember that the animal, when viewed from the rear, should be widest in the stifle area as this indicates superior muscling. A bull should be more massive than a cow of the same breed. In the bull, the development of the crest, scrotum and other secondary sex characteristics give you evidence of maturity.

The heifer and cow should appear feminine. The head and neck should be refined. She should show appropriate udder and teat development. She should have a wide muzzle so she can forage effectively.

Capacity

All beef animals should have adequate capacity or internal size. This is shown by a good spring of rib and depth through the chest and heart. Width through the chest which carries right through to the pins is desirable. Greater capacity is always more desirable.

Breed Character

The animal should exhibit breed characteristics according to the breed association standards. This will include size, frame, shape and conformation.

It is difficult to compare animals of different breeds in the same class. You can make this easier by becoming familiar with characteristics of the different breeds.

Fertility and Reproductive Capacity

This is where judging can be inaccurate. We do not know for a fact that any heifer will be a good mother, an easy calver, or will produce progeny with a good rate of gain. We do not know by looking at a bull that he will be a successful breeder. However, we do have indicators that assist us in predicting fertility. These are all you have to go on in the show ring. Here are some clues that the industry uses:

The Bull

- Head, neck and shoulders in proportion to the rest of the animal
- Head should be carried with poll slightly above the topline of the animal, indicating alertness
- A crest over the neck region, with size dependent on age
- Scrotum should be large and hang straight, not twisted
- Sheath should be compact and close to body

The Heifer

- Refined about the head, neck and shoulder
- Pins slightly below the hooks with good distance between the pins
- Signs of udder development with four evenly spaced teats
- Vulva should be tight and firm to guard against infection

The Cow

- The producing cow should show the same refined features as the heifer
- Udder balanced with four functioning teats
- Vulva healthy and flush with the body

In a cow-calf class, look at the calf. Is it healthy and thriving? Does it have energy, size and frame? Is its conformation better than that of the cow? An exceptional cow which produces an inferior calf will not be profitable to you. We want cows which pass on their superior qualities to their calves.

Condition

Condition means the same thing in breeding animals as “finish” does in the market animal. The breeding animal should have less fat than the finished steer. The breeding animal should not have excess finish or be ready for market.

Assess the amount of fat and muscle present to determine growth characteristics. If a heifer carries a lot of fat at one year of age, she will be a less efficient cow than a heifer

on the same diet carrying minimal fat or condition. You are not looking for skinny animals - you are looking for muscular, healthy cattle which are not fat.

There must be a desirable amount of muscle expression in both the sire and dam for the offspring to have the chance of developing desirable muscle. A bull will look meatier and have more overall muscle than a heifer or a cow. A bull should also have less fat than a heifer or cow. Females should show good muscling even though the muscles will not be as pronounced as in bulls.

Structure

Structure is the skeleton and frame or size of an animal. While there are differences in structure between the breeds, certain things remain true for all cattle. Good feet and legs are essential for good structure. The animal must travel for many years on these feet and legs, so they must be sound and correct. All beef animals must show good size and frame as determined by their breed. They should be long over the top and show capacity and depth.

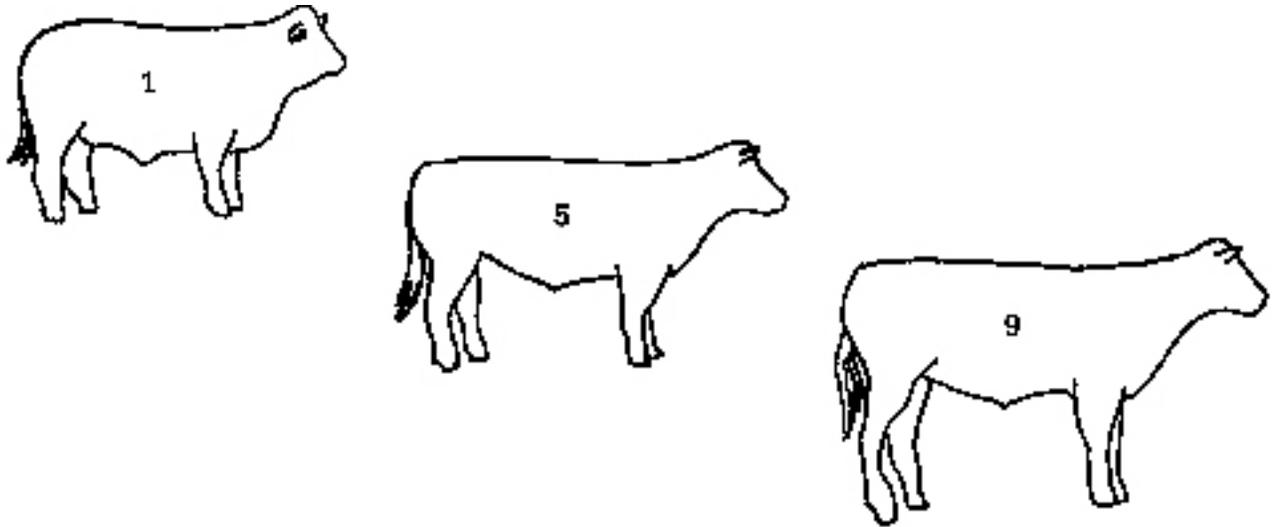
In addition to feet and legs, you should evaluate the rump when checking the structure of an animal. The pins should be slightly lower than the hooks. The tailhead should blend smoothly into the rump and spine. When viewed from behind, the rump should be wide between the pins and nearly square.

The animal should move straight and true. The front hooves should point straight ahead. The back hooves may turn in a little bit at the toe. The back hooves should be set down almost straight behind the front hooves when the animal walks. To see the hoof placement, look at the prints the animal makes in the dirt when it walks.

Body type or frame and muscling are economically important traits. They are related to the ability of the animal to gain weight, develop optimal muscling and cutability characteristics.

A process called frame scoring evaluates body type and muscle on a consistent basis from animal to animal. The body type and muscling at 6 to 8 months is often a very good indicator of the body type the animal will have as a yearling or adult.

Frame score is based on a scale of 1 through 9. The smallest type of cattle will get a low frame score and the largest type will receive a high score. A score of 8 or 9 does not necessarily mean that the animal is the best but indicates that it is the largest type of cattle.



The Breeding Animal Checklist

Feet and Legs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legs straight, square and placed wide apart • No swellings, cracks, or lesions in the legs or hooves • Correct set to the rear legs
General Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears healthy and alert • Blended, smooth body • Widest in the stifle • Bull thick and massive • Female refined with udder development • Evidence of lots of muscle; little waste in the neck and brisket
Breed Character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibits characteristics according to breed standards
Fertility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bull - massive with a high headset, crest development, super muscling, large straight scrotum, compact sheath
Reproductive Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female - refined and smooth, pins slightly below hooks, width between pins, shows capacity and depth, udder development
Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less finish than a steer • Evidence of superior muscling
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long over the top • Long straight legs • Lots of capacity and depth, large, wide hind • Moves straight and with ease

About Beef Breeds

In the beef cattle industry, there are many different breeds. In Alberta alone, there are over 20 breeds. There are important differences between these breeds which you must take into account when judging cattle.

Some breeds have been bred with the emphasis on carcass and growth characteristics while some have been bred for their hardiness and maternal qualities. They all look different in size, shape and colour. It is important to learn about the popular breeds and be able to take their individual features into consideration when judging. You can learn more about the breeds by looking at cattle magazines, breed books, promotional material printed by the breed associations and by attending cattle events.

Familiarity with the breeds is the key to solving the dilemma of comparing different breeds to each other. Know the characteristics of the different breeds.

A Few Final Hints

Now you know what to look for in the market steer and the breeding animal. The problem is actually picking out these things in the show ring, the field or the judging class. As a 4-H member you are taught how to groom and fit your animals to show them to their best advantage. You are trying to highlight the superior characteristics of your animal, and downplay the other characteristics.

Now the tables are turned and you must look beyond the wrapping and see the real animal underneath. It takes a lot of practice to do this successfully, but it sure can be fun to try!

Good luck judging beef cattle. What you learned for the show ring will help you when you go to the auction mart to buy a heifer, the neighbor's pasture to pick next years' calf, or the feedlot to pick the steers which are ready for market.

Judging will never be an exact science, but with a lot of practice and a little luck, you can become much more successful at selecting the most desirable animals!

The Judging Class

When evaluating the beef judging class, develop your own system and follow it each time you judge. Your first impression is the most important. Stand 8 to 10 meters from the class and view from a distance. Compare the animals.

When the animals walk, watch for:

- style, freedom of movement
- correct set to feet and legs
- strength of topline
- tightness of frame
- those areas where you look for muscle development
- firmness and amount of finish

When you view from the side, compare:

- size, balance
- length of body
- strength of top
- length of rump - from hooks to pins
- levelness of rump
- trimness of brisket and middle
- muscle development in forearm, round, over back and loin
- substance of bone
- depth of rib
- set to feet and legs
- length of neck
- finish over ribs and forequarters

When you view from the rear, compare:

- thickness over the back, loin and rump
- spring of fore and rear ribs
- trimness of middle
- muscling along the top and in the rear quarter
- freedom from excess finish in the twist, round and pins
- thickness through the stifle
- the set of rear feet and legs

When you view from the front, compare:

- breed type and sex character about the head and neck
- substance of bone
- set of front feet and legs
- muscling through the forearm
- depth and width of chest
- trimness in the throat and brisket
- smoothness through the shoulders

When you have an opportunity to handle the animals, check for:

- firmness
- uniformity, smoothness and amount of finish
- length of rump
- muscling in the shoulder, forearm, rear quarters
- thickness and quality of hide

Terminology For Reasons

The following terms are acceptable in your reasons. There are many more terms, but these will give you an idea of some of the terms you should be using in your reasons.

Remember to put emphasis on the different areas depending on whether you are judging market or breeding animals.

General Terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more lengthy heifer • Carrying more uniform thickness from front to rear • More desirable meaty type • Female showing more balance and symmetry • Longer, trimmer, more correctly finished steer
Head, Style and Breed Character Terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More feminine through the head, neck and shoulders • Shows more desirable breed character through head, ears and neck • Cleaner bone and more refined in the legs • Shows more desirable balance and eye appeal • More stylish and alert

Fore Quarter Terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuller in the heart with a more desirable spring of rib • More smoothly blended through the neck and shoulder • Shows more muscle expression in the forearm
Back and Loin Terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straighter and stronger over the topline • Thicker, meatier, more heavily muscled loin • More correctly finished over the top and loin
Hind Quarter Terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider, meatier steer • Extremely thick and muscular through the center part of the round • Freer from excess flesh in the twist • Cleaner and trimmer in the flank • Longer, deeper, more dimensional quarter • Showing greater evidence of muscling through the stifle region
Legs and Bone Terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straighter, stronger legged, standing on more substance of bone • Moves straighter and truer on the walk • Stands more squarely on all four legs • Longer bodied, longer hipped • Larger framed steer
Finish and Carcass Terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More uniform in his finish • More uniform fat cover • Cleaner over the loin edge • Showing a more desirable degree of finish • Harder, firmer and more correct in the finish over the ribs

Sample Reasons

Hereford Market Steers

"I placed this class of Hereford Market Steers 1 2 3 4 for the following reasons.

I started this class with 1, placing him over 2 because 1 is larger, stretchier, more heavily muscled and stands more squarely on more substance of bone than 2. 1 shows more muscle development in the forearm region, and is longer ribbed, longer rumped and thicker through the stifle. 1 has a more desirable amount of finish than 2. I grant that 2 is cleaner through the throat, neck and brisket than 1.

In my middle pair, I placed 2 over 3 in a very close placing because 2 shows more size, scale and length through the body than 3. 2 is trimmer and cleaner along the underline, and is cleaner in the throat than 3. 2 shows more muscle expression through the forearm than 3, and is cleaner and firmer through the flank. I admit that 3 shows more thickness through the top of the rear quarter than 2.

In my bottom pair, I placed 3 over 4 because 3 is thicker, meatier, and more heavily muscled than 4. 3 is more correctly finished and trimmer and cleaner through the brisket than 4. 3 shows a deeper, thicker, more heavily muscled rear quarter than 4. I grant that 4 is taller and more lengthy than 3, but felt that 4 was too wasteful in the brisket and twist regions to place any higher in the class.

These are my reasons for placing this class of Hereford Market Steers 1 2 3 4 as I see them here today."