From the ground up...The basics of livestock judging

Jeff Thayne

Iowa State University Livestock Judging
Livestock Judging???

- Livestock judging is the evaluation of an animal’s characteristics and making a comparison to other animals and the ideal standard of that particular class.
- After evaluating each animal individually, a ranking is assigned to that class.
Livestock Judging???

- A typical contest class consists of four animals, these animals shall be numbered 1 through 4
- Animals that are loose in a pen will have numbers on the animal
- Animals in a stanchion or haltered will be numbered from left to right when viewing them from behind
Why Livestock Judging???

- Enhances decision making capabilities and provides the opportunity to defend those decisions through oral reasons
- Oral reasons provide the framework for public speaking skills
- Builds character, integrity, and honesty
- Network with other individuals and producers who share similar interests
Why Livestock Judging???

- “Judging instills confidence in those people who may be timid and humbles those who tend to be conceited.”
  - Harlan Ritchie
Livestock Judging???

- A livestock judge should always remember that each class is officiated in a subjective manner, however to be the most effective one should judge objectively.
How to...Judge Livestock

- The majority of livestock judging competitions will consist of classes from the following: breeding and market cattle, breeding and market sheep, breeding and market hogs.

- To be successful a judge must understand the anatomy of each particular animal and being able to apply that to the animals intended function.
Cattle

- Market
- Breeding
  - Bulls
  - Heifers
Market Cattle

Priorities

☐ Muscle
☐ Correctness of Finish
☐ Structure and Movement
☐ Rib and Feeding Ability
☐ Balance and Eye Appeal
Market Cattle

- Muscle Indicators
  - Forearm
  - Rib
  - Loin
  - Hip
  - Stifle
  - Quarter
  - Base Width
Market Cattle
Market Cattle

- Finish Indicators
  - Brisket
  - Down Top
  - Over Ribs
  - Around Tailhead
  - Drop to flank
  - Cod fat
Market Cattle
Market Cattle

- Evaluating Structure
  - Front foot alignment
  - Shoulder angle
  - Strength of topline
  - Levelness and length of hip
  - Set to hock
  - Set to pastern
  - Heaviness of structure
Market Cattle
Market Cattle

- **Evaluating Rib/Feeding Ability**
  - Steers should possess dimension to their skeleton in terms of chest width and center body shape to ensure efficiency in a feedlot setting and the ability to deposit finish
    - Width of chest
    - Depth of body
    - Rib Shape
    - Uniformity of body depth
Market Cattle
Market Cattle

- Evaluating Balance and Eye Appeal
  - The proportionalism of the animal
  - How well the animal’s parts fit together
    - Length of neck
    - Levelness of topline and hip
    - Smooth pattern
    - General attractiveness
Market Cattle
Breeding Cattle
Breeding Cattle

- Priorities
  - Functionality
  - Growth Performance
  - Balance and Eye Appeal
  - Muscle
  - Femininity/Masculinity
Breeding Cattle

- Defining Functionality
  - Structural Correctness
  - Optimal Rib Shape Design
    - Depth of rib
    - Spring and shape of rib
Breeding Cattle
Breeding Cattle
Breeding Cattle

Defining Growth Performance

- As a livestock judge it is imperative to understand the marketing venue widely utilized by cattle producers...cattle are sold on per pound basis
- It is important to select cattle that have the ability to gain weight while possessing an optimal frame size to limit mature weight and maintenance costs
Breeding Cattle

- Defining Growth Performance
  - Length of face
  - Length of cannon
  - Length of body
  - Weight of animal
Breeding Cattle

- Defining Balance and Eye Appeal
  - Similar as in market steers
  - “Proportional”
  - Emphasis in heifers on attractiveness and refinement through the head, neck, and shoulders
Breeding Cattle

- Defining Muscle
  - Muscle is of importance in breeding cattle but less of a priority relative to market animals.
  - In heifers, it is important to select for cattle that are not excessive in their degree of muscling.
Sheep

- Market
- Breeding
  - Rams
  - Ewes
Market Lambs

- Priorities
  - Muscle
  - Correctness of finish
  - Growth/Weight
  - Skeletal Correctness
  - Balance and Eye Appeal
Market Lambs

- Muscle Indicators
  - Forearm
  - Rack
  - Loin
  - Hip
  - Leg
  - Base Width
Market Lambs
Market Lambs

- Finish Indicators
  - Breast/Chest Plate
  - Forerib
  - Over Ribs
  - Flank
  - Twist
Market Lambs
Market Lambs

- Growth Indicators
  - Length of cannon bone
  - Height at top of shoulders
  - Length of body
  - Weight
Market Lambs
Market Lambs

- **Skeletal Correctness**
  - Proper angle to shoulder and knee
  - Appropriate set to pastern
  - Levelness of top and dock set
  - Square set from hock to ground from behind
  - Heaviness of structure
Market Lambs
Market Lambs

- Balance and Eye Appeal
  - Similar to other species
  - “Proportionalism”
  - Trim chested
  - Length and smoothness of front end
  - Level topline and square hip
  - Attractive rib design
Breeding Sheep

- Priorities
  - Growth and Performance
  - Functionality
  - Balance and Eye Appeal
  - Muscle
Breeding Sheep

- **Growth and Performance**
  - A extremely important factor
  - Ability to offer future growth
  - Length of cannon bone and face
  - Length of body
Breeding Sheep

- Functionality
  - Similar to breeding cattle
  - Rib
  - Structural correctness
    - Pasterns
    - Length of stride
Breeding Sheep

- **Balance and Eye Appeal**
  - “Proportionalism”
  - Length and smoothness of front end
  - Cleanliness thru shoulder and chest
  - Levelness of topline and hip
Breeding Sheep

- Muscle
  - Indicators will be similar to market lamb evaluation
  - Excessive musculature should be avoided
Swine

- Market Hogs
- Breeding
  - Gilts
  - Boars
Parts of a Swine

- shoulder
- loin
- rump
- hip
- ham
- ham-loin junction
- side
- underline
- flank
- stifte
- hock
- jowl
- knee
- pastern
Market Hogs

- Priorities
  - Muscle Content
  - Lean Growth
  - Skeletal Width and Dimension
  - Structural Correctness
  - Balance and Eye Appeal
Market Hogs

- Muscle Content
  - Forearm
  - Blades
  - Loin- LMA of 6.5 sq. in.
  - Ham-Loin Junction
  - Hip
  - Stifle
  - Ham
Market Hogs
Market Hogs

- Leanness- absence of fat deposition
  - Jowl
  - Over blades
  - Elbow pocket
  - Loin Edge
  - Seam of Ham
  - Lower one-third of body
Market Hogs
Market Hogs

- Skeletal Width and Dimension
  - Width of Chest
  - Square Rib Design
  - Depth of Flank
  - Natural Base Width at the Ground
  - Ability to convert feed to gain
Market Hogs
Market Hogs

- Structural Correctness
  - Proper angle to scapula
  - Backward set and relaxed knee design
  - Correct angle to pastern
  - Looseness of hip and hock
  - Heaviness of Structure
  - Even and Wide Foot Design
Market Hogs

Desirable Skeletal Design
Market Hogs

Undesirable Skeletal Design
Market Hogs

Front Leg Structure

Rear Leg Structure
Market Hogs

- Balance and Eye Appeal
  - Proportional Skeleton
  - Attractive & High Quality Look
    - Levelness of Topline and Hip
    - Strength Behind Blades and to Loin
    - Quality to Hair and Skin Coat
Breeding Gilts

- Priorities
  - Functionality
    - Structural Soundness
    - Internal Dimension and Condition
  - Growth Performance
  - Muscle
  - Maternal Characteristics
Breeding Gilts

- Structural Correctness
  - Looseness of skeleton and mobility
  - Same visual indicators as market hogs
  - Of utmost importance to ensure sow longevity
Breeding Gilts

- **Internal Dimension and Volume**
  - Width of Skeleton
  - Depth and Shape of Rib
  - Natural Base Width at the ground

- **Condition**
  - Important for females to not be too heavy conditioned, however, an adequate degree is needed for sound reproductive intervals
Breeding Gilts

- Growth Performance
  - Females must possess the growth potential and genetics to farrow litters that are fast-growing and efficient
  - Gilts should be extended and not be too early maturing
Breeding Gilts

- Muscle
  - Indicators will be similar to market hog evaluation
  - Excessive musculature should be avoided
Breeding Gilts

- Maternal Characteristics
  - Vulva
    - Estrus Detection
    - Upturned/Tipped
    - Infantile
  - Underline
    - Pin/Blunt Teats
    - Size and spacing issues
    - Count