

Market Steer Essentials

Overview. The 4-H market steer project involves a time commitment of one to three hours per day and will generally last seven to 12 months. Proper selection, care, feeding and management of the market steer project are all production skills learned in addition to invaluable life skills. At the conclusion of the project, market steers are sold and eventually harvested for their beef. The basic information and resources needed to support the project are as follows.

Questions to Ask. To adequately address the needs of the 4-H family interested in market steers, the following questions will need to be asked:

- What are the goals of the 4-H member and family?
- Do you understand that the project is a seven to 12 month project?
- What facilities are available?
- Which shows will you be exhibiting the project?
- Will you need assistance in locating and selecting your project?

Selection.

Classification. Today, there are as many as 16 breed and breed-cross classes in Texas shows. Personal preference is one of the most common reasons 4-H members choose a particular breed. Unlike breeding beef heifers that are eligible for show in a certain breed based on pedigreed information, market steers are placed into breed based on the classification process performed at the show. Classification of steers into a breed is based on visual appraisal by show officials. Registration papers or any other documentation of breed type are not included in the process. More detailed information on classifying guidelines can be found in the “Texas Show Steer Breed Classification” publication. Classification standards (revised in 2006) are also printed in major livestock show catalogs. When selecting a market steer, you should be confident the animal will classify.

Slick shorn versus Haired Shows. Currently, of all major shows in Texas, only Fort Worth and Odessa are haired shows. Various county shows are also haired.

Age. Market steers are normally finished (fattened) at 14-20 months of age. Earlier maturing breeds (Ex. Angus, Hereford, etc.) will finish at younger ages than later maturing breeds (Ex. Charolais, Simmental, etc.). Market steers for the winter major shows are typically born from August to October. Market steer shows held in the fall will require steers typically born April to June. Steers are normally purchased soon after the previous year’s shows are completed because breeders have the next year’s calf crop weaned and ready to market at that time.

Quality Considerations. Other selection criteria include structural correctness, frame size, muscle, depth of body and capacity, and overall balance and eye appeal. When selecting steers, be aware of hair and fatness which can cause the perception that the animal is of much higher quality than he really is. Learn to look past the fat and hair and look for the true muscle, structural correctness and overall quality of the animal.

Where To Purchase Steers. Steers can be purchased through private treaty or through auction sales. Information on breeders or other sources of steers can be found from other steer exhibitors, on the internet, or show oriented magazines like “The Showbox” or “Purple Circle.”

Validation. Steers must be validated in the month of June for all Texas major shows. Tags for state validation are ordered (one order per county for 4-H and FFA) in April through the office of the Director of County Programs in College Station. Many county or local shows require steers to be state validated for eligibility at the county level while the remaining county or local shows utilize their own market steer validation procedures.

Facilities and Equipment. Facilities need not be elaborate; just basic, functional facilities will be adequate for a successful project. A minimum of 75 sq. ft. of well ventilated and drained covered space per steer is recommended. An additional .25 acre (100 ft. x 100 ft.) is also recommended to allow the steer to exercise. Make sure that steers have adequate shade during the summer and consider installing fans for additional cooling. Access to clean, fresh water and clean feed troughs are very important in maintaining the health of the steer as well as good growth and performance. Facilities should be cleaned of manure and feed refusal daily to help

maintain a good environment for the steer project. Other equipment needs may include water buckets, feed pans, brushes, combs, water hose, trimming chute, electric clippers, hot air blower, rope halters, show box, extension cord, and electric fan.

Nutrition. There are no magic feeds or supplements that make champions. Successful market steer projects are based on meeting the basic nutritional requirements of the growing animal. The basic nutrients required by market steers are water, protein, energy, minerals and vitamins. A balanced, commercially mixed feed that is 12 to 13 percent crude protein and contains 45 to 60 percent corn depending on the desired animal gain is the basis of the steer's diet. Steers should consume 2.0 to 2.5 percent of their body weight per day divided into 2 feedings (morning and evening). A feed that is consistent from bag to bag and fresh is very important in order to maintain feed consumption and steer performance. Also, make sure that a set daily feeding schedule is maintained and make any changes to the diet gradually over several days to avoid digestive problems. Be sure to monitor steer average daily gain and adjust the diet as necessary to meet the desired ending weight and fat cover.

Health. Every day that a market steer is sick is one day that the animal has not gained weight or potentially lost weight. Thus, minimizing the number of days that a steer is sick during the feeding period is important for the success of the project. Prevention is the key to any animal health program! Assume that the steer has received no vaccinations and implement a vaccination program according to your local large animal veterinarian's recommendations. Also, be sure to administer booster vaccinations as recommended on the label or as directed by your veterinarian. Deworm steers upon arrival and at least twice a year thereafter. Monitor the daily habits of your steer as well as his physical appearance. Depressed eyes, droopy ears, nasal discharge, labored breathing, a change in routine, and feed refusal are all signs of potential illness. The faster a diagnosis is made, the sooner he can be on his way to recovery. When administering drugs, always follow label instructions, administer injections in the neck region (or front elbow pocket for subcutaneous injections) according to Beef Quality Assurance procedures, and adhere to the withdrawal times before slaughter. The use of any drug in a manner other than stated on its label is regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and may be done only under the control of a licensed veterinarian. Texas livestock shows have strict policies against the illegal use of drugs and will disqualify animals if such drugs have been used.

Management. The amount of work that is put into a market steer is a direct reflection of the success of the project. Daily care of the market steer is just as important as nutrition, selection and health. Paying attention to the details is vital. Daily washing or rinsing, hair grooming, walking and showmanship practice are key aspects of successful steer projects. Hair is a competitive advantage for exhibitors that work hard at growing and grooming it. At shows where market steers are shown slick, hair and skin care is just as important as if they were shown with hair. Success is not free, it takes work to achieve it and market steers are no exception.

Rules. The Exhibitors' Handbook contains the rules for a particular show. Each show is different and the rules change from year to year. Each year take the time to review the rules of each show and keep a copy of the rules on hand while at the show. Ignorance of the rules is not a valid excuse for breaking them. One key section in all Exhibitors' Handbooks is the "Animal Health Regulations." Most major livestock shows (and some county shows) require a current set of health papers on an animal before entry onto the show grounds. Review the health requirements outlined in the Exhibitors' Handbook at least a month before the show because some tests required by the Texas Animal Health Commission take a week or more to perform.

Additional References.

- Managing Beef Cattle for Show. AS 1-2.
- Texas Show Steer Classification Guidelines
- Texas Major Show Weight Breaks