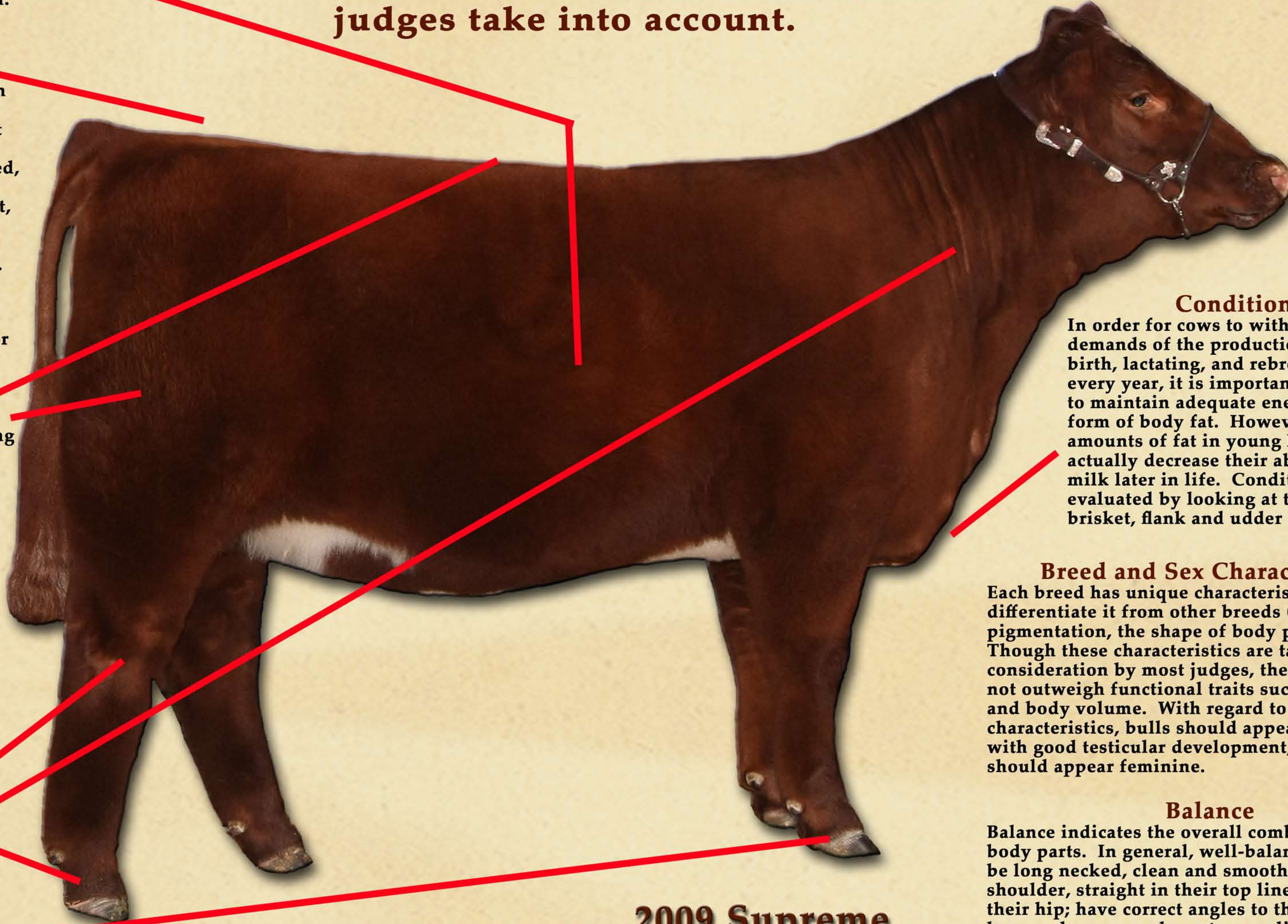


Cattle Judging Basics

Though judging breeding cattle always involves some degree of subjectivity, and opinions will vary from judge to judge, there are some basic traits that all judges take into account.



Body Volume

Body volume is an indicator of how quickly an animal will grow and how efficiently it can convert feed. In general, cattle that are deep bodied, have a good spring of rib, and stand wide on both ends are able to maintain their body weight without a great deal of extra feed.

Frame Size (Height)

Frame size is an indicator of how fast an animal will grow. However, cattle that are too large for the amount of feed that is naturally available in their environment may require additional feed, and therefore expense, in order to maintain their body weight. As a result, most judges will prefer cattle that are moderate in size and will not automatically select the largest animals.

Muscling

Though breeding cattle are to be used for reproductive purposes, their progeny or grand progeny will eventually be destined for market. As a result, muscling is an important characteristic. Judges will look for evidence of muscling down an animal's top (ribeye and strip loin cuts), and through its hip and hind quarter. However, too much muscling may negatively impact structure and balance and result in females that are not very feminine in appearance.

Structural Correctness and Soundness

The underlying purpose of a beef animal is to turn low-quality forage into a high-quality product. Therefore, it is imperative that cattle be sound enough to travel great distances in order to effectively forage for nutrition, and that bulls are sound enough to withstand the rigors of breeding. A sound beef animal will have an adequate angle to its shoulder and hock, and cushion to its pasterns and feet, and stand squarely on all four feet and legs.

Condition (Fat)

In order for cows to withstand the energy demands of the production cycle — giving birth, lactating, and rebreeding — each and every year, it is important that they are able to maintain adequate energy reserves in the form of body fat. However, excessive amounts of fat in young heifers can actually decrease their ability to produce milk later in life. Condition is usually evaluated by looking at the fullness of the brisket, flank and udder (females).

Breed and Sex Characteristics

Each breed has unique characteristics that differentiate it from other breeds (coloration, skin pigmentation, the shape of body parts, etc.). Though these characteristics are taken into consideration by most judges, they usually will not outweigh functional traits such as soundness and body volume. With regard to sex characteristics, bulls should appear masculine, with good testicular development, and heifers should appear feminine.

Balance

Balance indicates the overall combination of body parts. In general, well-balanced cattle will be long necked, clean and smooth through their shoulder, straight in their top line, and level at their hip; have correct angles to their feet and legs; and possess adequate muscling and depth of body.

2009 Supreme
Champion Heifer