

Steer Judging Basics

Though judging 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 will convert feed into muscle. In general, steers should be deep bodied, have a good spring of rib, and stand wide on both ends.

2009 Grand Champion Steer

Muscling

Because the purpose of a market steer is to produce meat, muscling is an important characteristic. Judges will evaluate steers for evidence of muscling down their top (ribeye and strip loin cuts), and through their hip and hind quarter. However, too much muscling may negatively impact structure and balance and result in steak portions that are too large.

Structural Correctness and Soundness

Though steers are destined for market and don't need to be as correct as their female counterparts that are put into production, the ideal steer will be able to walk freely with no major flaws. A sound beef animal will have an adequate angle to its shoulder and hock, cushion to its pasterns and feet, and stand squarely on all four feet and legs.

Fat Cover

The amount of fat immediately under the hide (subcutaneous fat) is generally related to the flecks of fat found within a steak that help make it flavorful, juicy and tender (intramuscular fat). Judges will usually evaluate the amount of fat by looking at the brisket and flank and handling the steer over the ribs. Most judges will select cattle that they feel have enough fat to indicate that the carcass will grade USDA Choice, but not so much fat that a lot of fat will have to be trimmed.

Balance

Balance indicates the overall combination of body parts. In general, well balanced steers 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.

