

# LIVESTOCK JUDGING GUIDE

**FOR 4-H CLUB  
MEMBERS**

**Cooperative Extension Service  
Kansas State University • Manhattan**



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# Achieving Skill in Judging

Judging is making a careful analysis of animals or carcasses and measuring them against a standard that is commonly accepted as ideal.

Four steps are involved in judging animals or their carcasses:

1. **Information**—The judge must know the intended use of the individuals that comprise the class.
2. **Observation**—The judge must carefully observe each individual in the class and note how it meets or fails to meet the requirements of its intended use.
3. **Comparison**—Each individual must then be compared with all others in the class to establish differences and similarities.
4. **Conclusion**—After completion of the first three steps, the judge must arrive at a logical placing for the class of animals or carcasses.

The ability to explain the placing of a class orally or in writing is very important to the improvement of livestock. Opinions must be expressed in clear, concise and understandable language if they are to be of benefit to others.

In addition to the improvement of livestock, the ability to justify decisions is extremely important in all aspects of life. Regardless of the profession, the importance of expressing one's ideas in a persuasive manner cannot be overemphasized.

In the training of livestock and meats judges, considerable emphasis is given to the formal procedure for stating reasons for placement. This is to give the trainee experience in organizing a clear, concise and accurate set of reasons. Consider the following points when preparing a set of reasons:

- Keep the reasons short and to the point.
- Avoid words, phrases or comments that do not add to the meaning of the reason.
- Discuss the class in a logical order, starting with the top individual and ending with last place.
- Reasons should be comparative, not descriptive, so as to establish a logical order of placing.
- Tell the truth, discussing only those things which you observed in that class.

## Taking notes

Good notes are a must for presenting reasons orally.

A small notebook which opens as a book is best. You can use two pages for a class without having to turn pages.

Use the left page of your notebook for general comments about each animal. Place the numbers in order down

the extreme left side of the sheet. Jot down the first impression that you have about each animal.

After you have placed the class, use the right page for the comparisons, grants and criticisms of each pair. Then you can refer to the left page to see if you have mentioned the more important things that you noticed first.

To save time, develop some sort of system for abbreviating. For example, write "1/2" for quarter, "dp" for deeper, "lg" for longer, and "s&s" for size and scale.

Do not attempt to write out all of your reasons before you give them orally. This is unnecessary and takes up valuable time. Be sure you know the correct procedure for giving reasons orally.

Use your notes to list the important items that you want to say about each pair. Prior to the actual presentation of your reasons, you can use your notes to help you remember the class.

(White)	1	2	3	4	
<b>KANSAS 4-H JUDGING CARD</b>	1 2 3 4				
	1 2 4 3				
	1 3 2 4				
	1 3 4 2				
	1 4 2 3				
	1 4 3 2				
	2 1 3 4				
	2 1 4 3				
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## Marking the judging card

An example of the Kansas 4-H judging card is shown here. With a class of four animals, there are 24 possible ways to place the class. Always be sure to mark both your contestant number and the name of the class being judged on each card.

After making your final decision, circle the proper placing on the judging card. Be sure to circle only one placing. Before handing your card in to the officials, write down your chosen placing in your notebook for all classes.

## Suggestions

Accuracy is the most important consideration when giving reasons. However, unless reasons are presented in a manner which is pleasant to hear, and clear and easy to follow, the value of accuracy is lost because much of what is said doesn't get through to the listener.

Here are suggestions on the organization and composition of oral reasons:

There are many different systems of organizing reasons. The system presented here is logical and clear, and can be used in all judging situations. Here is a basic outline for an entire set of reasons. It is followed by examples and comments on the specific steps involved.

(The placing for this example is 1–2–3–4).

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
|             | Step 1. Give name of class and how you placed it.                   |
| Top Pair    | Step 2. Give reasons for placing 1 over 2, using comparative terms. |
|             | Step 3. Grants for 2 over 1, pointing out advantages of 2 over 1.   |
|             | Step 4. Criticism of 2. Critical terms                              |
| Middle Pair | Step 5. Reasons for placing 2 over 3.                               |
|             | Step 6. Grants for 3 over 2.  |
|             | Step 7. Criticisms of 3.  |
| Bottom Pair | Step 8. Reasons for placing 3 over 4.                               |
|             | Step 9. Grants for 4 over 3.  |
|             | Step 10. Criticism of 4.  |

In giving reasons, a class of 4 is divided into 3 pairs—a top pair, a middle pair and a bottom pair. Use the same procedure for each pair.

For purposes of presenting the following examples, assume that a class of market steers placed 1–2–3–4.

**Step 1. Class name and placing.** To begin the reasons, state the name of the class and your placing.

**Step 2. Reasons for placing 1 over 2.** This should be done much the same as in a newspaper story—with the important, general points first, then details to complete the story. In judging market steers, examples of “general” terms are: nicer balanced, smoother, higher quality, thicker and higher yielding.

Mention differences with regard to these general factors in the lead statement, then details in the succeeding sentence or sentences. (Details may also be mentioned in the latter part of the lead statement.)

Example: “I placed 1 over 2 because he was a trimmer steer and was thicker and nicer balanced. He was a larger-framed steer that was wider over his loin, deeper and thicker through his quarter, and had a more uniform finish over his top and down over his ribs than 2.”

It is important not to use too many terms in close succession because the terms come so fast the listener cannot possibly hear and evaluate all of them. (Example: “One was trimmer, middled thicker, nicer balanced, more up-standing, deeper ribbed, wider topped, thicker quartered steer than 2.”)

Note the first example, which is rather long. The terms are divided by the words, “steer” and “and had.” Especially in the case of terms used as adjectives, not more than two or three should be used in succession.

More terms of the kind, “wider over his loin” and “deeper in his quarter,” can be used in succession because more words are required to mention each point, and it is easier for the listener to follow.

Try to avoid extremely long sentences when giving reasons. A variety of short and long sentences is easier to listen to and give.

**Step 3. Grant for 2 over 1.** “I grant (or realize or recognize) that 2 was a smoother, more stylish steer that was trimmer middled and stronger over his top than 1.” (Always end a grant statement with “than” plus a number.)

**Step 4. Criticism of 2.** “. . . but I placed 2 second because he was a narrow topped, poorly balanced steer that was narrow through his quarter.” Use **descriptive** terms while criticizing an animal. For example, say a steer is small framed or lighter muscled than the steer you placed above him.

An exception to this rule is if you are able to make a class comparison, such as: “I placed 3 fourth because he was a poorly balanced steer that was ‘the lowest set, shortest sided, most conventional patterned steer in the class.’”

Use the same procedure for the middle and bottom pairs as you did for the top pair. These two pairs may be introduced by: “In the middle pair I placed 2 over 3 because . . .” and “In the bottom pair I placed 3 over 4 because . . .”

State reasons in complete sentences rather than phrases. A fundamental principle to keep in mind is that if it isn't grammatically correct, it isn't correct in a set of reasons.

## Words and phrase that should not be used in oral reasons

There are differences of opinion regarding the use of some words and phrases in stating reasons. Each of the examples is considered undesirable by some people and all of them can be replaced with better words and phrases. Eliminating all of them will improve the presentation of your reasons.

- **Animal or individual.** Instead say “barrow,” “gilt,” “wether,” “ewe,” “steer,” “heifer,” etc.
- **It.** Instead say either “he” or “she.”
- **I would like to see.** Instead of saying, “I would like to see 2 wider topped,” point out the fault directly: “I criticize 2 because he is narrow over the top.”
- **Lacks.** Avoid this term. Usually it is more effective to directly point out the fault than to say an individual lacks something. For example, instead of saying, “I criticize 4 because she lacks depth,” say, “I criticize 4 because she is shallow.”
- **For being or for.** Instead of “I criticize 3 for being shallow,” say “I criticize 3 because she is shallow.”
- **Carrying.** Example: instead of “carries down into a thicker quarter,” say “is thicker through the quarter,” or “has a thicker quarter.”
- **Kind of (steer, barrow, etc.).** Instead of, “a smoother kind of a barrow,” say simply, “a smoother barrow.”
- **Is a heifer that is.** For example, “1 is a heifer that is smoother and typier.” The phrase, “is a heifer that is,” only adds unnecessary words and emphasize that 1 is a heifer. Say, “1 is a smoother, typier heifer.”
- **I placed number 1 steer over number 2 steer.** The words, steer and number, be omitted. It is sufficient to say, “1 over 2.”
- **I placed this class of Angus steers in the order of 1–2–3–4.** Leave out “in the order of” because the phrase adds nothing to the meaning.
- **Leaving or left.** Instead of, “I left 4 third because . . .” Say, “I placed 4 third because . . .” or “I criticize 3 because . . .”
- **For these reasons I placed this class.** This is unnecessary. Conclude the reasons with criticism of bottom individual.
- **Placing.** It is better to say, “I placed . . .”
- **Criticizing.** It is better to say, “I criticize . . .”

## Presenting oral reasons

In presenting oral reasons it is extremely important to make the best impression possible. Always try to look your best when you step up to give your reasons.

It is not essential to be extremely dressed up, but a clean, well-groomed appearance is important. Never give reasons while chewing gum or tobacco. In addition, remove your hat prior to presenting the set. Try as hard as you can to be both pleasing to listen to and look at.

Here are additional things to consider in presenting oral reasons:

1. Be ready to present your reasons when called upon. However, if you have not had at least 10 minutes since

presenting your last set of reasons, you can ask the judge for more time.

2. Never use notes when actually presenting oral reasons.
3. Most officials will give you your placing card. Check to make sure it’s yours, then place it behind your back and start to give your reasons.
4. Don’t stand too close to the official. The preferred distance is about 10 feet away.
5. Stand erect with your feet spread to about the width of your shoulders. Keep your hands behind your back with your card. Check your card when you change pairs, if necessary, to be sure you keep the numbers straight.
6. Impress the official by showing confidence in your placing. Look him/her squarely in the eye when you talk. If you can’t look him/her in the eye, look at a spot on his/her forehead. This will give the appearance that you are maintaining eye contact.
7. Do not shout when you are giving your reasons but rather talk in a louder-than-normal, conversational voice.
8. Speak in a convincing tone.
9. Don’t talk too fast. You want to be sure the official hears everything you have to say.
10. Vary the tone of your voice to emphasize the points you consider the most important.
11. Body movement or hand gestures may distract an official. Facial expressions are permissible, but be careful of excessive head movement.
12. If there are identifying marks or characteristics in a class, use them in your reasons to help you remember the class. (For example, a red-necked steer or a golden heifer.) These things also help to show that you were very observant.
13. A good set of reasons should not be more than two minutes long. If they are longer, the reasons become boring, the things you say are not the major points and your chances of error are greater.

## Selecting breeding animals

The foundation of animal production is the breeding herd or flock.

Select animals that possess:

- indications of high reproductive efficiency.
- efficient conversion of feed.
- a type of pattern that will reproduce desirable carcass composition, fleece characteristics or performance capabilities.
- sound feet and legs and structural correctness. (See examples on page 6.)

The ability of the individual to meet these requirements is determined by two factors: heredity and environment.

Our modern production systems call for the use of records as an aid in determining the genetic potential of an individual and his/her response to environment. However, records cannot tell the complete story. Visual evaluation of the live animal is important in selecting superior breeding stock.

A live animal has many features in his/her make-up that aid in predicting his/her value in a breeding herd or flock. Train your eyes and mind to detect and evaluate these features. By measuring one animal against another, you can select the animal that will best fit into a profitable breeding program.

### Selecting slaughter animals

The meat-type animal of today has a high percentage of muscle and a low percentage of fat.

The best indicators of muscling are:

- thickness through the rear quarter.
- natural thickness and turn over the edge of the top.
- muscling in the forearm.
- natural width of leg placement.

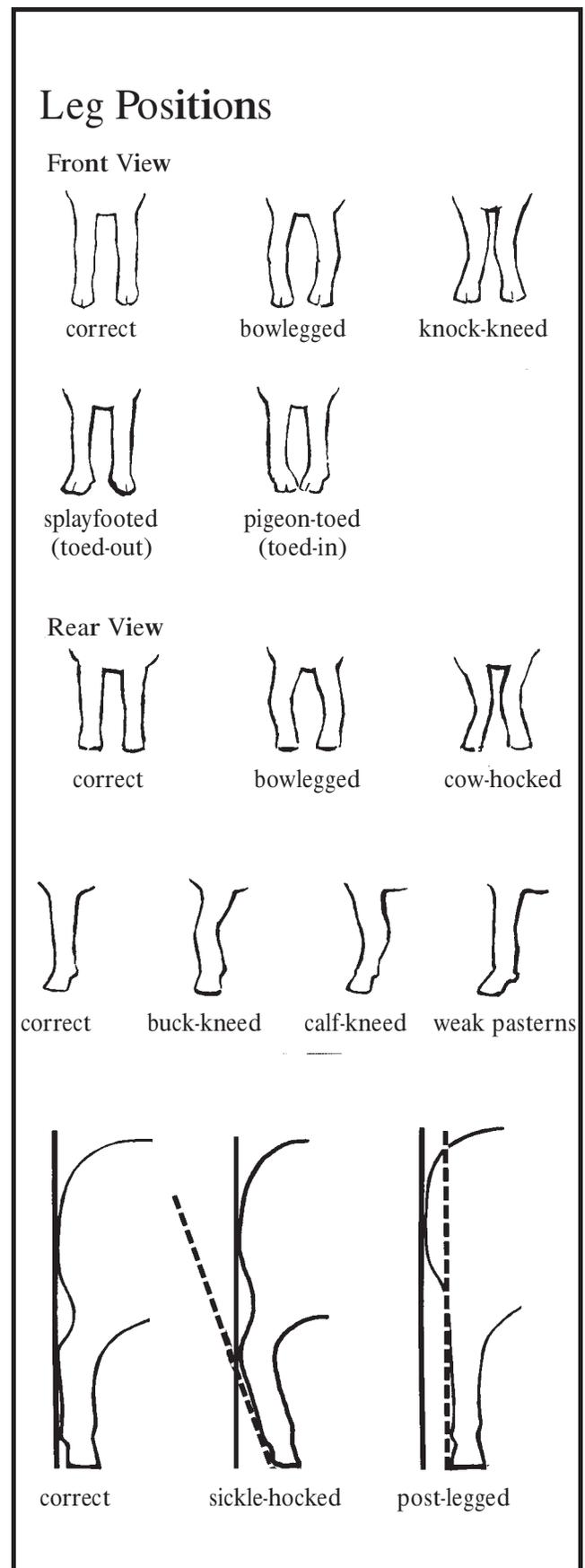
When observing these areas on a calf, be sure the thickness you see is due to natural muscling and not excess condition of fat.

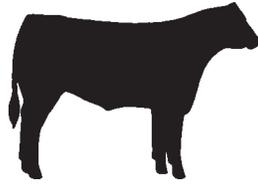
Fat is measured by three criteria: kind, amount and location. To appraise the fat on a market animal observe the finish:

- along the edge of his top from his shoulders back to his tail head.
- along his side from his head to his rear quarter.
- along his underline from his neck to his twist.

Enough fat must be present to indicate quality in the carcass and to ensure acceptable palatability of the meat. Usually, it is considered desirable for a steer to have between .30 and .45 of backfat in order to meet both the carcass quality and cutability requirements. All fat in excess of this requirement is undesirable.

When judging in the show ring, not only is the carcass value of the individual important, but also the general pattern as it relates to efficiency of production. The animal going to slaughter must meet the demands of all segments of the meat animal industry—the producer, the feeder, the processor and the consumer.

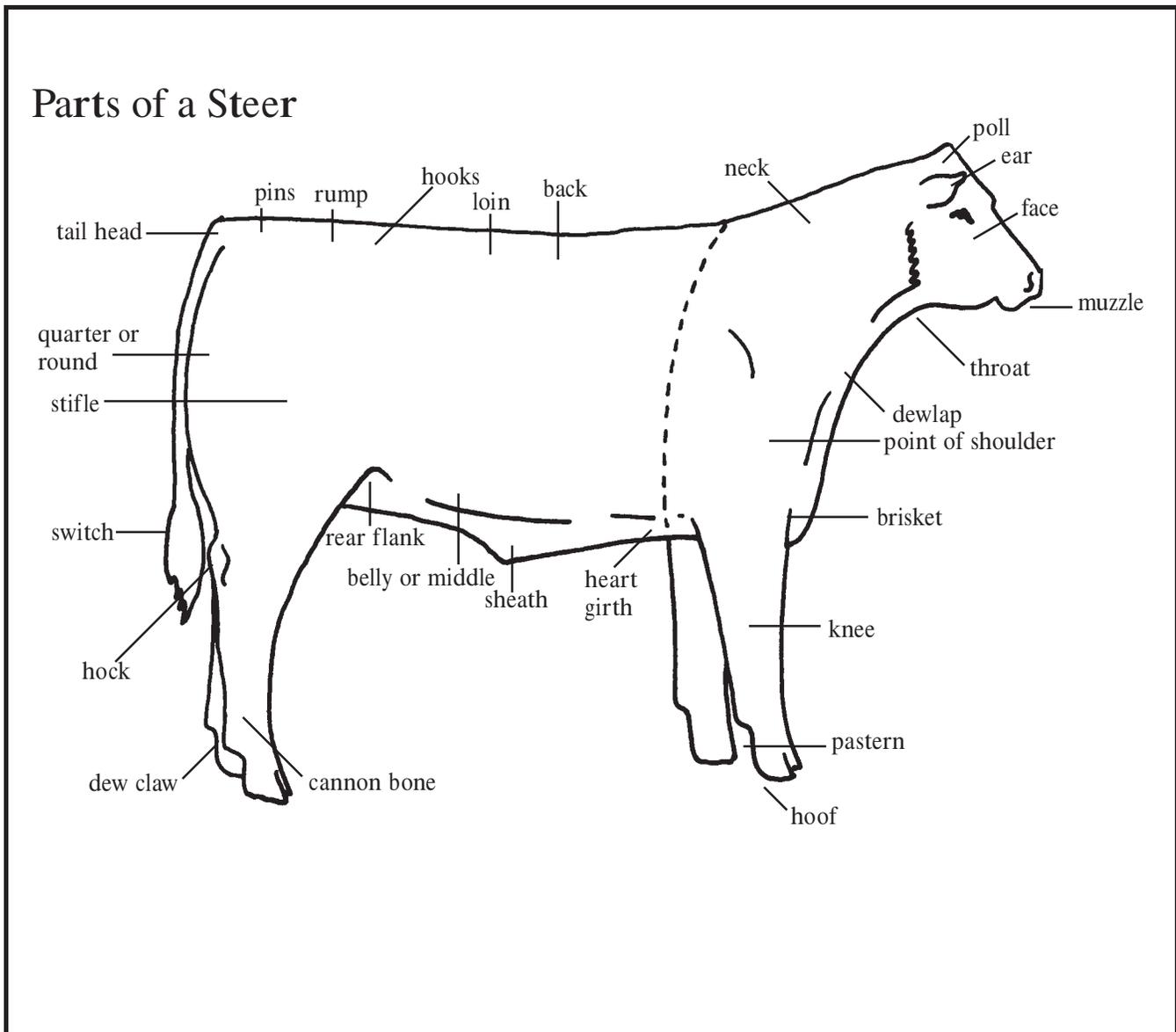




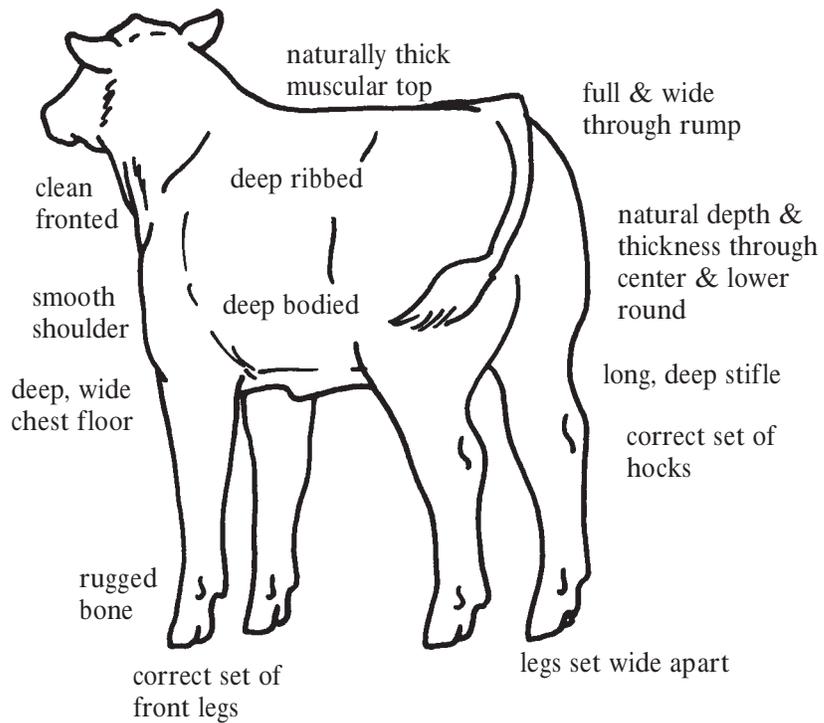
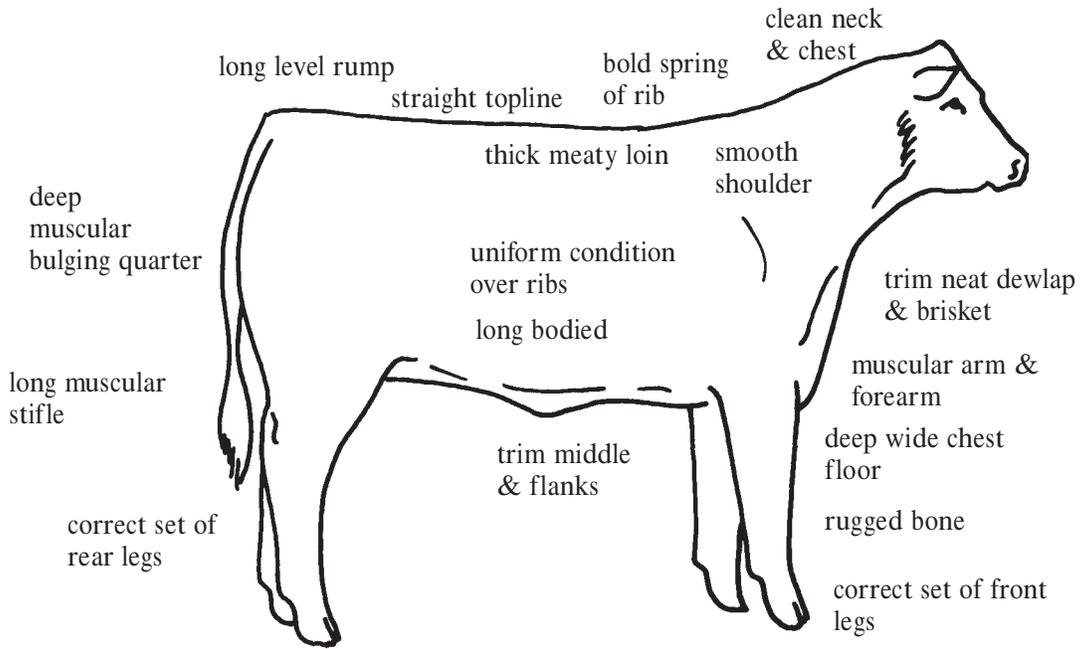
## Judging cattle

The ideal market steer weights 1,100 to 1,250 pounds and possesses enough size and scale to carry this weight with a minimum of finish. The steer should demonstrate enough finish to indicate a high quality carcass (choice grade), but yet a minimum of finish to increase carcass cutability. In addition, heavy muscling is desired in the high-priced cuts (rib, loin, round). The ideal steer should also be relatively trim about the middle and clean fronted.

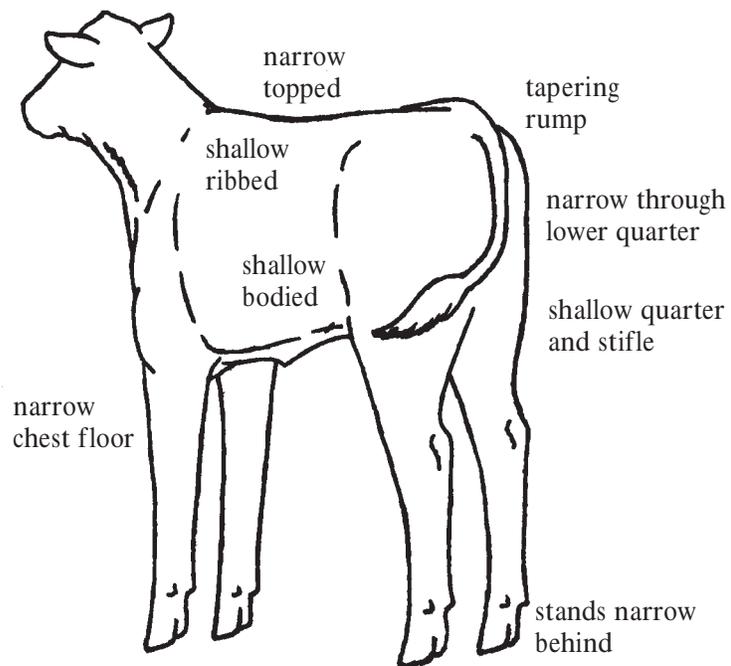
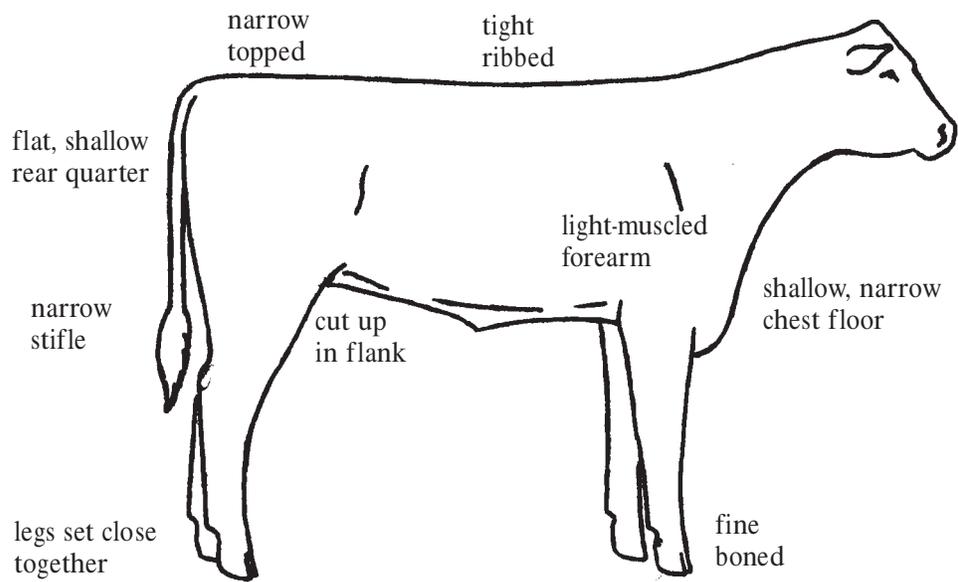
The ideal breeding bull and heifer should be well balanced with ample size and scale. They should possess the same meat-type characteristics of the ideal steer, but in addition, possess sound feet and legs. Breed and sex character and reproductive organs should all receive emphasis in a sound, progressive breeding herd selection program.



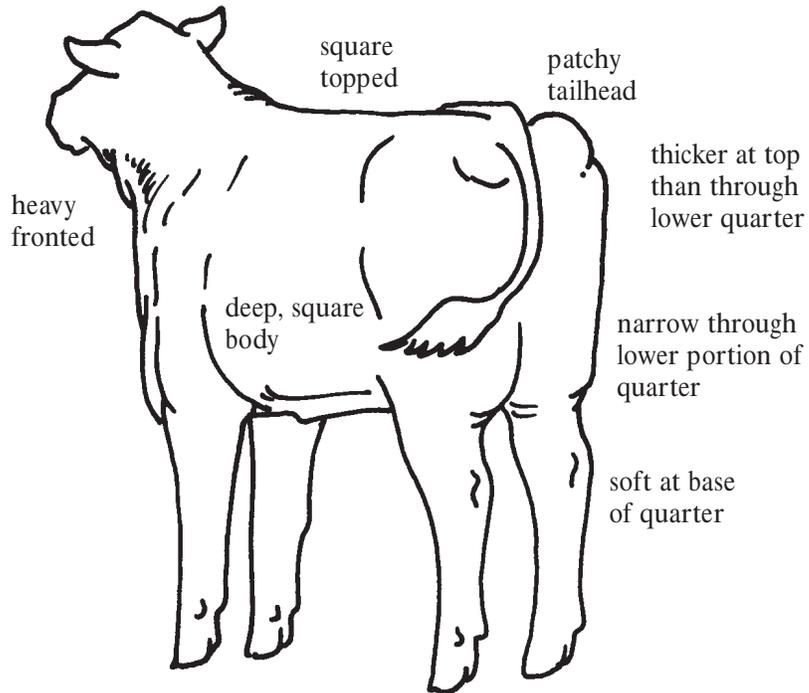
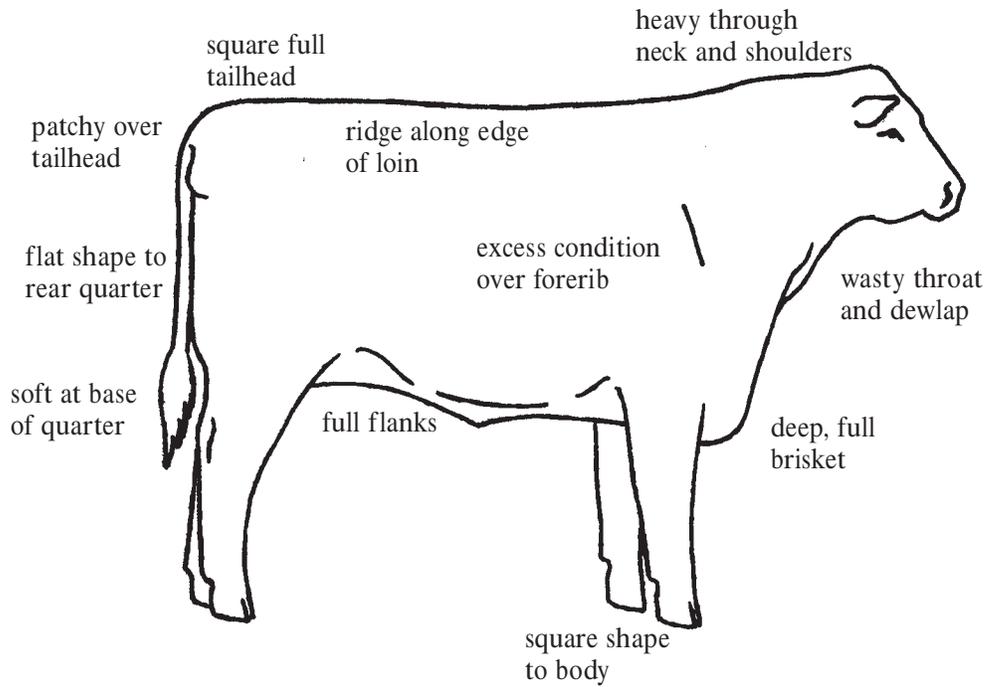
# Ideal Market Steer



# Narrow, Shallow, Light-muscled Steer



# Over-conditioned, Light-muscled Steer



## Terms to use when judging market steers

Desirable	Undesirable
<b>General Appearance</b>	
nicer balanced	small
more stylish	short-coupled
straighter lined	plain
cleanest made	light-muscled
meatier	over-finished
more eye appeal	poor balanced
nicer profile	
beefier made	
stouter constructed	
most powerfully built	
<b>Head, Neck, Shoulder</b>	
cleaner front end	coarse-headed
trimmer fronted	leathery-fronted
flat-shouldered	heavy-shouldered
smoother shouldered	open-shouldered
wider chested	coarse-shouldered
deeper ribbed	narrow-chested
<b>Top, Loin, Ribs</b>	
stronger top	narrow-topped
thicker back or loin	weak-topped
more natural thickness down his top	shallow-ribbed
more muscular loin	
more correct turn along his topline	
more muscular shape to his top	
more spread of muscle over his rib and loin	
beefier shape to his topline	
<b>Middle</b>	
trimmer middled	wasty-middled
cleaner through his lower one-third	heavy-middled
neater about his underline	
<b>Hindquarter</b>	
thicker rumped	steep-rumped
longer from hooks to pins	short rumped
leveler rumped	narrow rumped
more muscular quarter	light-muscled
wider standing	narrow-standing
thicker, wider stifle	flat quarter
more outer turn to his quarter	tapered through his quarter
more expressively muscled quarter	
more volume of muscle through his hip	
<b>Finish</b>	
firmer handling	thin, bare
more uniform covering of finish	soft finish
a more correctly finished steer	soft handling
stands a better chance of making the choice grade	overfinished
more desirable degree of finish	underfinished
higher degree of finish over his 12th and 13th ribs	
<b>Carcass Merit</b>	
more total pounds of lean meat	
thicker, heavier muscled carcass	
higher percentage of saleable lean	
higher ratio of lean to fat	
more total pounds of edible portion	
greatest quantity of high priced cuts	

## Sample Reasons

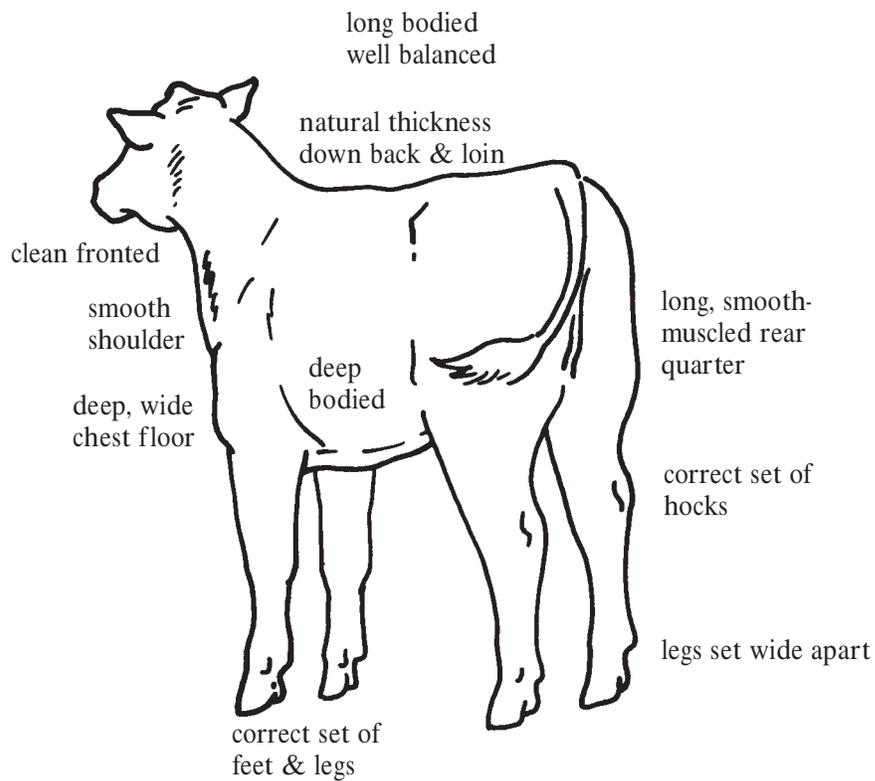
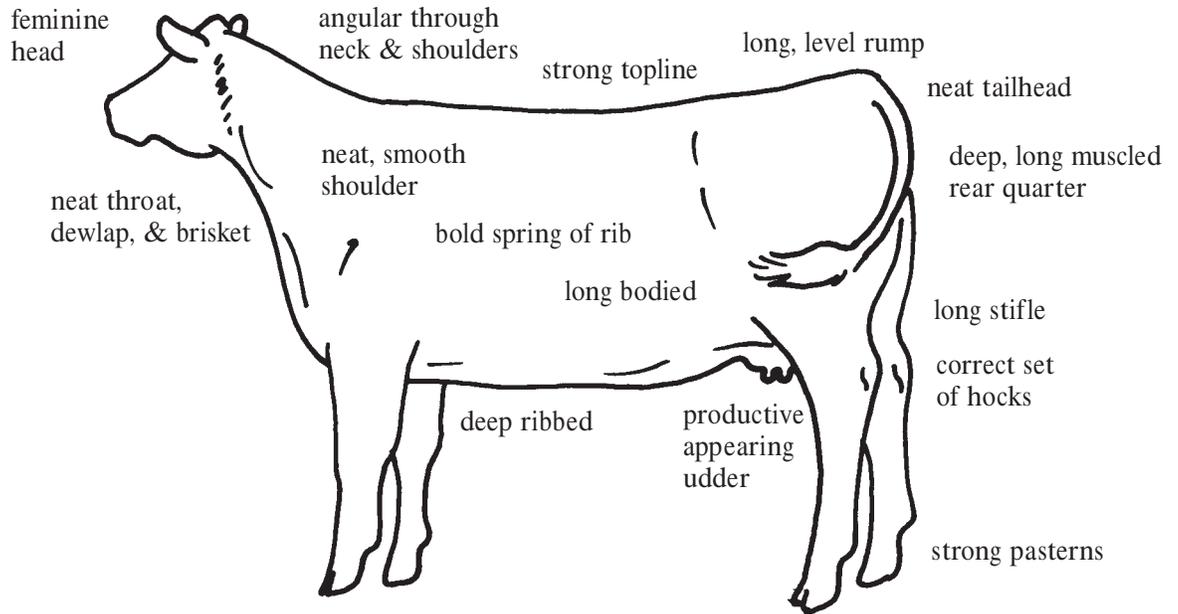
I placed the mixed market steers 4-3-2-1.

Four wins the class because he is the heaviest muscled, most powerfully constructed steer of the four. In the top pair of black steers that are more desirable in their degree of finish, I placed 4 over 3. Primarily, 4 is a beefier made steer that has a more muscular shape to his top and disperses this advantage to all aspects of his quarter. To compliment this, 4 is a deeper ribbed, bolder sprung steer that stands on more substance of bone. Finally, 4 should hang a carcass with more total pounds of red meat than 3. I realize that 3 is a nicer balanced steer that is especially cleaner about his neck and smoother in his shoulder. However, I placed him second as he not only is a shallow bodied steer, but he gave up the total muscle dimension needed to beat 4.

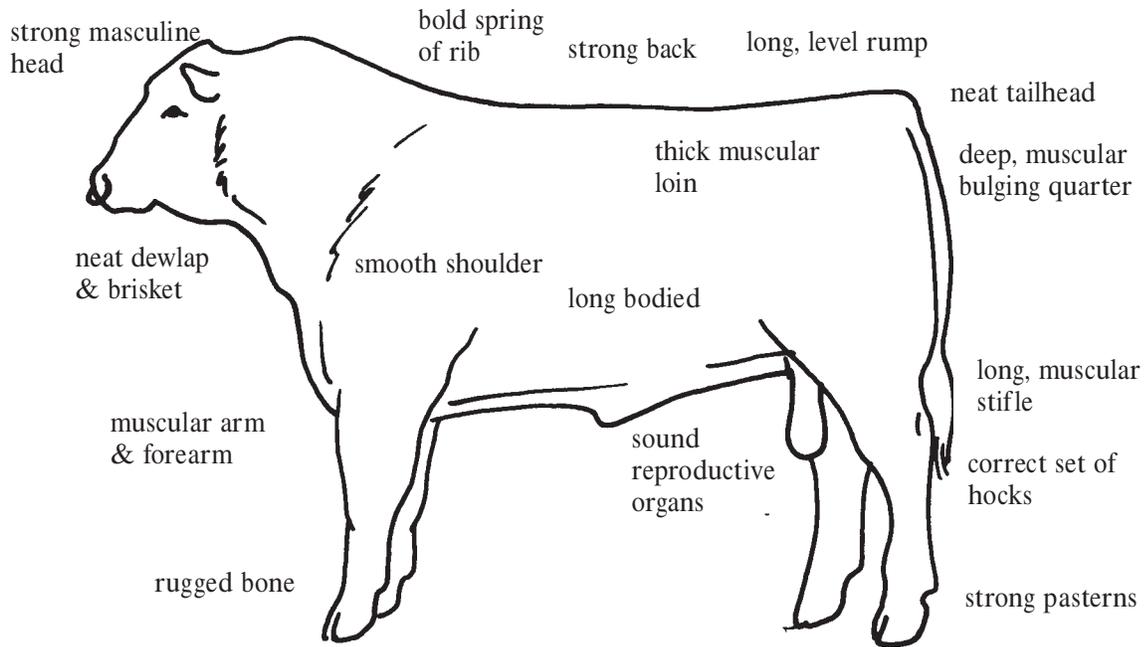
Even so, I placed 3 over 2 in the middle pair of steers that were contrasting in type. Three is a nicer profiling steer that is more structurally correct than 2. He has a more desirable slope to his shoulder, is stronger topped and moved more correctly off his rear legs. But more importantly, 3 handled with a higher degree of finish over his 12th and 13th ribs, consequently his carcass should be more apt to grade choice. I'll admit that 2 is a thicker topped steer that exhibited more outer turn to his quarter. As well, 2 is a higher volume steer that appears to be of a heavier weight. However, this does not compensate for the fact that he is the barest finished, poorest balanced steer in the class that is coarse in his shoulders and weak in his top, and thus, I placed him third.

Nonetheless, it was his advantages in muscle dimension, capacity and length of body that compelled me to place 2 over 1 in the bottom pair. The red steer is unquestionably the heavier muscled steer that is longer and meatier down his top and thicker ended. Furthermore, 2 is a stouter made, bolder sprung steer that travels wider at his base. He should hang the meatier shaped carcass that would cut open the larger ribeye. I understand that 1 does have a higher degree of finish. However, this works to his disadvantage and I placed him fourth because he is the most excessive in his finish and the lightest muscled steer of the four. Moreover, 1 is the shortest bodied, poorest balanced steer that should hang a carcass with the least desirable yield grade of any in the class.

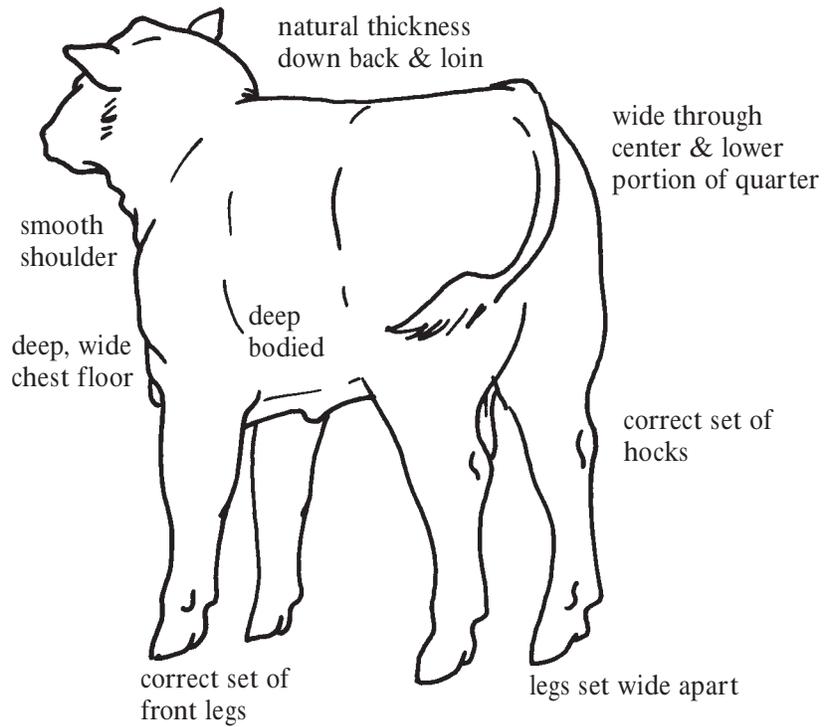
# Ideal Heifer



# Ideal Bull



long bodied  
well balanced



# Terms to use when judging breeding cattle

Desirable	Undesirable
<b>General Appearance</b>	
meatier, heavier muscled	narrow
thicker	plain
more size and scale	light-muscled
growthier	narrow made
nicer balanced	poorly balanced
more stylish	overconditioned
stretchier, longer	dummy
straighter lined	small-framed
more rugged	short-sided
higher quality	loose-framed
smoother made	slack-framed
	tight, round-muscled
<b>Head, Neck, Chest</b>	
more feminine fronted	plain-headed
more masculine	coarse-headed
more refined head	lacks breed character
wider and deeper chest	narrow-chested
trimmer brisket	heavy brisket
shows more growth potential	short, square head
more angular fronted female	early maturing, blocky head
longer headed, longer necked	coarse-fronted
more upfronted	low-fronted
<b>Shoulders, Middle, Ribs</b>	
smoother shouldered	coarse-shouldered
tighter shouldered	tucked through the heart
wider topped	constricted heart girth
stronger topped	weak-topped
more spring of rib	easy in the top
more natural thickness down the top	narrow-topped
heavier muscled down the top	shallow-bodied
wider over back and loin	heavy-middled
bolder spring of rib	low at the loin
deeper ribbed	rough at the hooks
fuller heart girth	
trimmer middled	
more capacious (higher volume)	

Desirable	Undesirable
<b>Rump, Quarter</b>	
more bulge to the quarter	light-muscled
thicker through the stifle	flat-quartered
more bulge to the stifle	shallow-quartered
more muscular shape to the quarter	tapers from hooks to pins
squarer rumped	peaked rump
more nearly level from hooks to pins	pinched at tail head
longer rumped	rough at tail head
higher at the pins	high at tail head
smoother at the tail head	droopy rump
	slopes from hooks to pins
	short-rumped
	patchy around tail head
	round and bunchy in muscle structure
<b>Feet and Legs</b>	
stands on more bone	light-boned
stands on more rugged bone	fine-boned
more correct on his/her feet and legs	sickle-hocked
more correct set of hocks	posty-legged
stands wider both front and rear	weak pastern
stronger pasterns	bowlegged
stands on squarer placed legs	cow-hocked
stand more squarely on all fours	buck-kneed
more correct slope of shoulder	splayfooted
	pigeon-toed
	straight-shouldered
<b>Action or Walking</b>	
handled herself/himself more	walks under behind
correctly on her/his feet and legs	rolls in front
longer strided	spraddles
straighter moving	moves close in front or behind
freer or truer striding	knuckles over in the pasterns
	sluggish
	restricted in movement

## Sample Reasons

I placed the Simmental heifers 2–3–1–4.

Two put together a better combination of structural correctness, volume and femininity, so I placed her over 3 in the top pair of red spotted heifers. Primarily, 2 has a more correct slope to her shoulder, is more nearly level down her top and handled herself more correctly off her rear legs. This compliments the fact that she is a cleaner fronted heifer that is deeper ribbed, bolder sprung and is more correct in her body condition. I realize that 3 is the heaviest muscled heifer in the class that stands on more bone and travels wider at her base. However, I placed her second because she was short and thick about her neck, straight in her shoulder and the heaviest condition heifer in the class.

Even so, I preferred her advantages in muscle dimension and apparent weight over 1 in the middle pair. Three is the beefier shaped heifer that has more spread of muscle in her top and disperses this advantage into all aspects of her quarter. Furthermore, she is a wider built heifer that

has more width to her chest, is bolder sprung and wider set at her pins. Finally, 3 appears to have a greater apparent weight per day of age than 1. I'll admit that 1 is more feminine through her front one-third. She is especially cleaner about her neck and laid in smoother through the shoulder. However, she is also the narrowest made, flattest ribbed heifer in the class, and thus I placed her third.

However, in the final decision, I placed 1 over 4. The red blaze-face heifer is nicer balanced, and more structurally correct. Unquestionably, 1 is straighter down her topline, more nearly level from hooks to pins and more correct in the set of her hind leg. As a result she takes a longer, freer stride than does 4. As well, 1 is a cleaner pattern heifer that is smoother fronted and longer bodied. Yes, 4 is more muscular down her top and wider based. Nonetheless, I placed her fourth as she was the shortest bodied, plainest fronted, most structurally incorrect heifer in the class.