

Selecting, Feeding, Fitting, Grooming and Showing Beef Cattle

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Today, there are many breeders of quality show steers and heifers. Anymore, a show animal is not a mistake, or freak, but is the result of mating the right males with the right females. I feel the breeders that are the most successful producing quality show cattle have cows that are good milkers and have the genetics behind them to produce structural correctness and the correct muscle pattern that the judges of shows are mandating.

With the reasonable price of embryo transfer, we are seeing more breeders producing outstanding show cattle through embryo transfer.

Selecting Show Cattle

Probably one of the most important factors to consider in selecting beef cattle for show is to select from reputable breeders of quality cattle. With this in mind, your next step is to select animals that are the right age, size and weight for your particular show.

Getting down to the basics of qualities that good show prospects should possess, I feel the first thing one should look for is **structural correctness**. Show cattle should have straight legs – both fore and hind legs. If the legs are not straight at the beginning of the feeding period, they will get worse as their weight increases. There are exceptions to this, but nine times out of ten, the problem will get worse.

Look for a strong straight top line that never droops even when the animal relaxes. Show cattle should be long-bodied, clean-front, up-headed and possesses a lot of balance and style. Look for correct muscling. Beef cattle should be thicker through the lower part of the round when viewed from the rear. The muscle should be long – not rounded.

I like to see cattle standing on a heavy bone that is medium in length as well. You can determine if an animal is going to be a large, medium or small framed animal by looking at the length of the cannon bone. The beef cattle industry today is calling for the middle or road framed cattle that are really thick when viewed from the rear. Some other factors that are important in selection are breed, color, disposition and finally hair. In selecting steers, color and hair are very important to me. Judges are definitely prejudice to color and hair. One can cover-up a lot of undesirable characteristics of an animal if the animal has good hair that has been worked with and trained. When feeding for the major shows, selecting a breed should be considered according to the likes and dislikes of the feeder. A good disposition is very important in selecting show cattle.

The age of a show calf is extremely important when selecting steers and heifers. You need to know the classes for the shows you plan to go to before you select your show calf. Ideally, you do not want to choose a heifer that will be the youngest in its class. Be sure to choose a steer that will be old enough to grow to at least the minimum weight limit. Steers should really be 14-19 months old by show day.

After you have selected your animal, be sure that you find out if the animal has been vaccinated

against black leg and malignant edema and any infectious disease that might be prominent in your area. Find out what kind of feed the animal has been eating and try to start them on a similar feeding program.

External and internal parasites need to be controlled in order for your show calf to grow properly.

Halter Breaking

When you load your calf to bring him home, I feel you can help yourself a great deal in halter breaking him if you will halter him either before you load him or after you get him in the trailer. After you get him home, tie the animal in a pen daily and have the exhibitor teach him to lead. Remember that **TENDER LOVING CARE** is a big factor during this period. The calf is having to adjust to a new environment, new feed, etc. If the exhibitor will be his friend, he can win a lot of confidence in him during this adjustment. **Comb and brush!** Exhibitors should spend time talking to him and never give him a chance to kick. When they are training their calf for show, they should always move slowly around him to keep from getting him spooked. I believe that a person can train a calf to kick. Warm exhibitor not to walk up behind a calf and touch him without first letting the calf know that they are there.

Feeding

One should adjust a calf slowly to the ration you want to feed him. There are several ways of feeding show cattle that has proven to be successful to people, but these practices seem to work best for us. We try to start our cattle on a 11-13% protein ration.

I think that most important factor to practice is to have exhibitors feed their calf at least two times a day and as nearly as possible, the same time each day. A good rule of thumb to follow when feeding calves is to get them to eat at least 2% of his body weight. When you have him eating this amount, you should feed him all he can eat within one hour. He should be hungry when the exhibitor walks into the pen. Of course, you want to increase the amount of feed as the animal grows larger. I think that we tend to waste feed by feeding calves more than the need in order to gain a reasonable amount per day. We end up having to draw a belly off these calves before show time.

Depending upon the length of your particular feeding period, you should grow him first and then gradually change your ration so you can put enough condition on him to grade. The best grain I know of that will put condition on a steer is steamed flaked corn. Increase your corn gradually to avoid scouring. Use roughage to prevent this. Cotton seed hulls is a good source of roughage. Also, I like to feed a very small amount of high quality hay after the evening feeding especially during cold weather. When you are limited to the amount of time you have to finish a calf, you should feed him as much corn as you can possibly can without scouring him. Individual calves can take more corn than others. Exercise is the best key to putting a good firm finish on a steer. Some calves "belly up" because they drink too much water. If this happens, control the amount of water he gets and offer more feed.

I might also bring out that during the feeding period, you should trim the calf's feet as needed. It is a must that you keep the feet trimmed if you want to have winners!

Exhibitors should also comb their calf every day and during hot weather or even warm weather, they should wet the calf down daily and comb its hair up and forward. A riceroot brush will help train coarse hair on calves. Using a blow dryer will also help to train wild and coarse hair. Good hair is part of having a champion! Put the calf in the trim chute daily to brush and blow him. That way it is used to the chute, blower, clippers, etc.

Facilities

Probably, one of the most important factors to keep in mind when building facilities is to start with the right foundation. As far as shelter is concerned, I like to keep the calf under a shed during the day and turn him out at night in a small trap. Keep the grass mowed where he cannot graze unless you are trying to grow him. Keep the pen clean. If you clean it daily it doesn't take long.

Build pens with wire or cattle panels, so that there is maximum air movement on the calf during hot weather and keep fans on him. You may need to add a mister to your fan to help keep the calf cool during the summer. If students can fix their shed where they have portable sides that can be removed or rolled up in dry weather, this is ideal. Keep in mind that the dryer the pen, the cleaner and healthier the calf.

Also, two weeks before the show, I would feed the water out of buckets, just like you would if you were at the show. This seems to eliminate the problem of cattle not eating or drinking at the show. You can add some type of flavoring to the water at home and at the show to help eliminate the difference in the taste and smell of the water.

Grooming

One of the most important factors of having a champion at a show is having him dressed in his Sunday Best! By this, I mean having him groomed to look as good as he possibly can. Many times I have seen calves that were brought into the show ring that had the potential to be the champion, but were not clipped and groomed to their potential. Consequently, they were just another calf in the class. Do most of your clipping before you get to the show, not after you get there.

The first thing to do towards getting a calf ready for show is to clip his hair. Before you clip him, make sure the calf is clean as clipper blades are expensive. There is no way that I can explain how to do this without demonstrating by using a calf. I like square-rumped cattle. Blocking the calves correctly can also help to give them a square rump. Believe it or not, you can cut hair off a calf and make him look bigger in certain areas. Learning to be smooth and skillful with a pair of clippers is accomplished through many hours of practice. I think the key to doing a good job clipping a calf is to have a mental picture of what you want the calf to look like and then clip the hair until you feel that the calf looks as good as you can possibly make him look. Keep in mind

that you can't put hair back on the calf after you take it off. Grooming a calf for show is something that should be done about 30-45 minutes before showtime. Don't make the mistake of standing a calf in a trim chute for hours before the show, because the calf will get tired and will not show well in the ring.

Most shows now do not allow the use of adhesives and glues. Show supply dealers now carry other show day dressings such as Revive and White Lightning. I suggest you experiment at home with these products and select the ones you can do the best job with. That way on show day you know which dressing to use and how to properly apply it.

Probably one of the most serious problems that agriculture teachers and county Extension agents have when grooming animals for show is that they have to get several animals ready for one class. I guess the simplest solution that I can give to this problem is to try to get organized and train in advance the people that will be helping you get the cattle ready. Believe me, you need help when you have to get four or more head ready for one class or even when you have cattle back to back, class to class.

I try to make sure that the hair is up on the rump and body, and that every hair is in place. Then I work on the tail head. The last thing to do before going into the ring, I put on the Final Mist and make sure that the calf has the right amount of fill. If he is hollow, give him water and watch him drink until he is filled and then take it away. To make a calf drink, don't water him the morning before you show him. Usually he will drink. You can make a calf drink by putting a handful of table salt in his mouth. Usually they will drink within 45 minutes after you salt their mouth.

When you have finished showing your calf, you should use purple oil, E-Z Out, Clean Up, etc., to remove the paint, touch up, foam, etc. It is most important to get the grooming aids out of the hair as soon as possible after the show.

Showmanship

Here again you can have a potential champion and if he is not presented to the judge in the right manner, he may just be another calf in the class. Probably one of the first things to think about when showing a calf is how the showperson should be dressed. I feel that one should dress like a person who works with cattle would dress. This eliminates tennis shoes, t-shirts and western suits with ties and ag and 4-H jackets.

As far as what to do in the show ring, I feel that there are several basic rules that we try to follow:

1. Always lead from the left side of the calf.
2. Lead the calf with your hand on top of the lead shank.
3. Always lead your calf with his head up and forward.
4. Carry your show stick in your left hand, pointing downward and towards the back of the calf.
5. Train your calf at home to stand with all four legs under each corner of his body.
6. Always lead your calf out of the line and to the right and back through the same hole when the judge asks you to put in a different hole.

7. Keep your calf set up at all times.
8. Always try to keep one eye on the judge and one eye on your calf.
9. Be cool and calm in the show ring, avoid making any fast movement.

There are many small things that come through experience that can be done and I suggest to an inexperienced show person to pick out showpersons that are good and try to learn from them. I hope that this information will help you in selecting a show calf that will develop into a champion.

Good luck!