

## Selecting a Show Steer

This fall when you go looking for the perfect steer that will win you a blue ribbon, what characteristics are you looking for? The question you need to ask yourself is; will the steer *quality grade* and *yield grade*? These two factors determine the market value of the carcass which is how the judge evaluates the class.

What is *quality grade*?

*Quality* is important in meat products to ensure customer satisfaction. *Quality* can be identified as those factors that affect tastefulness, flavor and juiciness of the meat.

*Quality* grading of beef carcasses is determined by the color, texture, and firmness of the meat in the ribeye area. Carcasses are rated as Prime, Choice, Select, and Standard. You want a steer that will be Prime or Choice at the end of your project.

What is *yield grade*?

*Yield grade* (YG) is an estimate of percent retail yield of the four primal cuts of beef (chuck, rib, loin, and round) and is also known as cutability. *YG* identifies the differences in the yield of lean red meat to waste fat. *YG* is determined on the four following traits:

1) hot carcass weight 2) fat thickness at the 12<sup>th</sup> rib 3) percent of Kidney, Heart, Pelvic fat 4) Ribeye area. Carcasses can be a 1-4 yield grade. One (1) being very heavy muscled with very little fat and four (4) being little muscle and too much fat.

When buying a steer the five most important things to remember are frame, muscle, balance, structural correctness and disposition. All of these criteria are of equal importance when making a decision.

**1) Frame-** Choose a moderate frame steer that will weigh between 1100 and 1250 pounds at fair time. Large frame animals require a longer time to feed out therefore, a large framed steer will not have enough fat at the time of the fair to make the Choice *quality grade*. A small framed steer will fatten too soon and the steer will have a poor *yield grade* at fair time.

**2) Muscle-** Choose a moderately thick muscled steer so that the animal will have a good *yield grade*. However, some very heavy muscled breeds are known for having poor marbling. This means these breeds may have a very low *quality grade*.

**3) Balance & Style-** Choose a steer with balance and style. There should be as much in the front quarter area as there is in the rear quarter. A deep bodied calf that is full in the flank is desirable. He should be uniform in his capacity and ruggedness from front to back.

**4) Structural Correctness-** Your steer should have nice straight rear legs with a little set to his hock that allows him to flex freely when walking. Proper set to the hock means an angle is present in the hock joint and that the joint is deep. There should be some slope to his shoulder. His pasterns should have some slope to them as well. A structurally correct calf will walk smooth and have a long stride. His feet should point straight ahead when he stands and walks. The calf needs to have a large circumference of bone to handle the additional weight when reaching a finished weight.

**5) Disposition-** When selecting a show steer it is very important that you select an animal that has a good temperament. An animal that is nervous will not eat properly therefore, he will not gain weight. Also you may not be able to show him. Most importantly you could get hurt trying to break the steer since they can not be forced to do anything.

These five factors can only be learned by years of experience judging cattle and their carcasses. So do not be afraid to ask questions. A good resource for comparing cattle with their carcass data is

<http://www.animal.ufl.edu/youth/resources/Evaluation/liveevalprac.htm>

***Good Luck!***