

Beef Handbook

Evaluation Of Market Cattle

When selecting and evaluating market cattle, the 4-H member must keep in mind the purpose of these animals. The primary function of market animals is meat production. Therefore, traits such as muscling and finish are emphasized. Frame size and structural correctness are examined but to a slightly lesser than in breeding cattle.

Muscling: Modern market cattle should exhibit extra muscling down their top and through their hind quarters. These are the areas for which the high-priced cuts come.

Traits that are found in the ideal market steer include:

- < more natural thickness down the top
- < more muscular loin
- < long, level rump
- < thicker through the center of the quarter
- < wider deeper stifle

Finish: Finish refers to the amount of fat cover a market animal possesses. An ideal market animal should have the minimal amount of body fat and still be able to reach the Choice quality grade.

Desirable traits in regard to finish include:

- < smooth and uniform fat cover over ribs
- < uniform depth of body
- < freedom from fat patches about tailhead
- < no excessive fullness in brisket

Frame Size: Current trends in market cattle frame size have shifted toward moderation. Market cattle should have enough frame to enable them to reach an acceptable market weight (1100 - 1350 lbs.) at an age of 12 - 18 mos.

Acceptable traits for today's frame size include:

- < moderate hip height (frame size 5.0 - 7.0)
- < extra length of body
- < longer rump

Structural Correctness: While it is not emphasized as greatly as it is with breeding cattle, structural correctness is an important selection criteria when judging market animals.

As with breeding cattle, look for animals that are:

- < standing squarely on front and rear legs
- < heavier boned
- < Moving with a long, reaching stride
- < more nearly level from hooks to pins
- < possessing adequate set to the hocks
- < displaying slope to the shoulder