

# 4-H Market Steer Handbook:

## Market Steer Selection

When you have your housing, fencing and equipment in order, the next step is selection of the show steer. Remember, no amount of feed or ability can hide major conformation faults or incorrectness. It takes both top management and a good steer to be a class winner and earn a champion award.

When selecting your club calf, take advantage of all good cattle people in your area. Some sources of help are parents, Extension agent, FFA instructors, breed representatives and producers. These people are interested in you and your project, so seek their advice.

In any project, goals and guidelines are helpful. A good steer should have these statistics:

1. Weigh more than 500 pounds at 7 months of age.
2. Average more than 2.5 pounds daily gain from weaning to slaughter.
3. Weigh more than 900 pounds at 12 months.
4. Grade USDA Choice between 1,000 and 1,250 pounds.
5. Have a USDA Yield Grade less than 3.0, preferably 2.5 to 2.0 at show time and slaughter.

To meet these guidelines, select calves from herds that emphasize growth rate and use fast-gaining, performance-tested bulls. Finding a top prospect is easier said than done. However, there are basic criteria to look for in selecting the club steer that will help you predict how the finished steer will look.

### Weight

An important factor to consider when selecting a steer is weight. "Weight per day of age" is a good indicator of the future growth potential of the steer. The heaviest calf for his age may not always be the best. Study the calf and decide the composition of his extra pounds. If the weaning steer is heavier because of excessive fat, he will be fat as a yearling and will probably become too fat too soon. Also, if the prospect is

extremely big and large-framed, he may not be correctly finished by show time. Try to select a calf whose finished weight will be between 1,000 and 1,250 pounds at show time.

Use Table 1 to insure selection of a steer that has the opportunity to reach the desired weight at the show. The table is developed on the assumption that the steer will gain two pounds per day from the time selected or purchased until the show date. This will account for the time it takes to get the steer on full feed and include the growing and finishing phase.

Table 1  
Expected Show Weights in Relation to Time  
of Selection and Initial Weight

Begin Weight	Begin Date	May 1 Weight	July 1 Weight
400	Sept. 1	800	1000
450	Sept. 1	890	1050
500	Sept. 1	980	1100
550	Sept. 1	1030	1150
450	Oct. 1	870	990
500	Oct. 1	920	1040
550	Oct. 1	970	1190
600	Oct. 1	1020	1140
650	Oct. 1	1070	1190
600	Nov. 1	960	1080
650	Nov. 1	1010	1130
700	Nov. 1	1060	1180

1. First, determine the number of days between the time the steer is purchased and the date of the show.
2. Multiplying the number of days between those dates (selection date and show date) by two pounds per day will give you an estimate of how much total gain will be made by show time.

- Adding the total gain expected to the steer's weight at selection time will provide an estimate of the steer's show weight.

This can save a lot of disappointment of working with a steer for 5-6 months prior to the show only to find out that the calf is not eligible to show because it did not make the minimum weight.

The average of two pounds per day may be too conservative for some steers but is a good rule of thumb to use. It is much easier to hold a steer's weight back the last 30 days than it is to try to put on an additional 200 pounds in the same time period. Also keep in mind the minimum weight a steer must meet in order to show. Check with your Extension agent or leader and be sure your steer will exceed the weight requirement by at least 10 percent.

### Hip Height Measurement

A possible tool to assist in selecting a club calf is the use of hip height and projected slaughter weight (Table 2). Hip height measurement is taken directly over the point of the hip with the calf standing on level ground. Be sure to take an accurate measurement.

By knowing the age of the calf and the hip height in inches, it is then easy to determine frame size and expected slaughter weight. For example, consider a calf born in early November of the previous year which measures 46 inches on October 1. Table 2 shows a 11-month-old calf, 46 inches tall, as a frame score 4. The calf should weigh between 1,050 and 1,150 pounds to grade low choice.

Having some idea of the expected slaughter weight of your calf will also give you a good idea of how much he needs to gain between selection and show day. For example, if the calf in the previous example needs to weigh 1,100 pounds at show time and weighs 650 pounds October 1, then:

$$\begin{array}{r}
 1,100 \text{ pounds projected slaughter weight} \\
 - 650 \text{ pounds present weight} \\
 \hline
 450 \text{ pounds gain / 180 days to show} \\
 = \mathbf{2.5 \text{ pound average daily gain.}}
 \end{array}$$

This calf would need to gain approximately 2.5 pounds per day - to reach the projected slaughter weight.

Table 2  
Relationship Between Weight and Hip Height Inches of Steers At Various Ages and Frame Size and Expected Weight At Which Steers Reach Desired Slaughter Grade.

Frame Size	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Expected Weight	750	851	951	1051	1151	1251	1350+	
Choice Grade	850	959	1050	1150	1250	1350	pounds	
Age of Steer in Months	7	36.0	38.0	40.0	42.0	44.0	46.0	48.0
	8	37.0	49.0	42.0	43.0	45.0	47.0	49.0
	9	38.0	40.0	42.0	44.0	46.0	48.0	50.0
	10	39.0	41.0	43.0	45.0	47.0	49.0	51.0
	11	40.0	42.0	44.0	46.0	48.0	50.0	52.0
	12	41.0	43.0	45.0	47.0	49.0	51.0	53.0
	13	41.5	43.5	45.5	47.5	49.5	51.0	53.5
	14	42.0	44.0	46.0	48.0	49.0	52.0	54.0
	15	42.5	44.5	46.5	48.5	50.5	52.5	54.5
	16	43.0	45.0	47.0	49.0	51.0	53.0	55.0
	17	43.5	45.5	47.4	49.5	51.5	53.5	55.5
18	44.0	46.0	48.0	50.0	52.0	54.0	56.0	