

## Priorities in judging dairy cattle

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### Overall:

A systematic and logical method will make judging cows much easier, and will keep you from busting classes. A technique that works well is to always keep in mind your priorities. You're looking for **good uddered, dairy** cows with **functional feet and legs** and **size and strength** to top the class. Your priorities are udder, dairy character, and feet and legs, **then** body capacity, **then** the rest of general appearance. Your top cows **must** be sound in their udder, dairy, and have functional feet and legs. It is incredibly important not to get hung up on details like tail settings, toplines or shoulders when making your initial groupings. Udder, dairyness and legs are the priorities. Group cows on these and then within that group, fuss about details. Learn to make the distinction between something that is really wrong, and something that you'd like to change but you can live with. If a cow can't walk, that's wrong, but you can live with an ugly topline and some set to her hocks if she's dairy with a good udder and is functional.

### Priorities within category:

- **Udder:** Suspensory ligament, teat placement, height and width of rear udder and strength of fore udder attachment are the priorities. Shape of fore and rear udder, teat size and shape and veining are less critical.
- **Dairyness:** Cleanliness over the shoulder, ribs, rump and thighs, length of neck and flatness of bone are the priorities.
- **Correctness/General Appearance:** Set to the hock, location of the thurl and hind leg relative to the body and strength of pastern are the priorities. Straight toplines, neatly laid in shoulders and level rumps are less important.
- **Body capacity:** Stature, depth of rib, length of body and spring of rib are important within this category, but remember, body capacity is the LEAST important of categories.

## Initial Analysis:

For each cow, ask yourself (IN THIS ORDER):

- **Udder:** What do I like? What would I like to change? Within udder, what are my priorities? Is this a cow with a good udder, an udder I can live with but I'd like to beat, or a poor udder that has to move down toward the bottom of the class?
- **Dairyness:** What do I like? What would I like to change? Is this a dairy cow, an acceptably dairy cow I can live with, or a fat pig who has to move down?
- **Feet and legs:** What do I like? What would I like to change? Within feet and legs, what are my priorities? Is this a cow with a good feet and legs, feet and legs I can live with but I'd like to beat, or a poor set of legs that has to move down toward the bottom of the class?
- And **only** then do you worry about body capacity, topline, shoulders and rumps.

## Grouping and Placing:

Start the class with your good uddered, dairy cows with sound feet and legs. If you have more than one cow that is good uddered and dairy with functional feet, and legs, sort cows out **within** that group, and start with the cow that has the most going for her. Next come your cows that are only okay on dairy with good udders, feet and legs. Next come your cows that are okay on two of the three. Stale cows, fat cows, poor uddered cows, cows that can't walk **must** go last. The only cows the fat cow or the poor uddered cow can beat are cows that combine two or three of these problems.

- When you get into a bind, **remember your priorities**. If you don't have an easy class winner, give up some size and scale to get the cow that combines dairyness, udder and functional correctness. Close your eyes to the ugly rump, or less than perfect leg set.
- **Don't pay for extra!** You're looking for that animal that **best combines** dairyness, udder, correctness and size and scale. Do not give up this combination for an animal that's extra in one area, but lacking in others. You do **not** necessarily need the BEST uddered cow at the top of the class, or the **most** dairy. You need the cow that **best combines** udder and dairyness with functional correctness.
- **Find the easiest thing to do first, and do it.** Slam that small ugly bad uddered thing, start with that All-American. Get her out of the way and focus your effort on the tough decisions. This does not mean knee jerk on an ugly rump, or a slight problem in udder.