

# Judging Fat Steers



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# Judging Fat Steers

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The ability to judge livestock is a talent acquired through learning and practice. The first essential is a knowledge of what the ideal or standard type animal should look like. Learning to make accurate observations and pass good judgment on these may lead to success.

## HAVE AN IDEAL

Before starting to judge, have a mental picture of a perfect animal. Put together those desirable features of the best animals or pictures you have seen and think of them as belonging to one individual. This ideal animal should be kept in mind and compared with other animals which you may be judging. A critical comparison of each animal with the ideal should include not only general appearance but every detailed part of the body.

## BE AN INDEPENDENT JUDGE

If you want other people to have confidence in you, you must have confidence in yourself. You can develop self-confidence only by making your own decisions.

## BE SYSTEMATIC

The keen judge of livestock has a definite pattern which he follows in arriving at a decision. First he stands twenty feet or more from the animal to get some idea of general appearance. He will observe from the side, rear and front. The next step is to examine more closely for details. He may feel for thickness and quality of flesh and pliability of hide. Do not handle needlessly.

The following points should be considered in judging fat steers: General appearance,

weight, conformation, condition, quality, substance, soundness.

## GENERAL APPEARANCE (Type)

Type has been defined as "an ideal or standard of perfection which combines all the characteristics that contribute to the animal's value and efficiency for the purpose specified". Balance or symmetry is the blending of the different body parts of an animal into a pattern which will make it attractive and useful. Feet, legs and action influence appearance and should be considered.

## WEIGHT

Weight is greatly influenced by fatness. Weight for age is important.

## CONFORMATION

Conformation refers to the form or build of an animal and is determined by the shape of all the various body parts.

## CONDITION

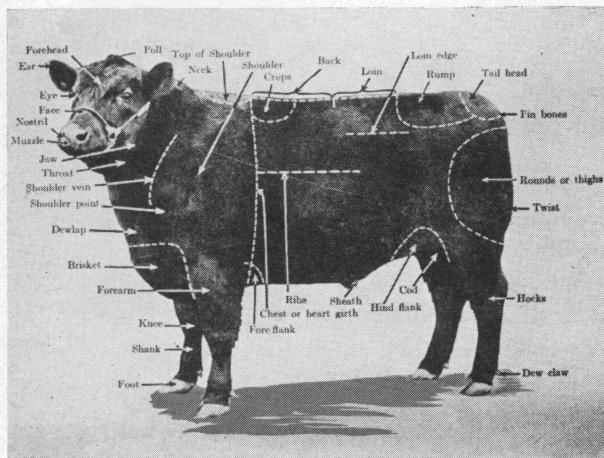
Condition means the degree of finish or fatness.

## QUALITY

General quality is shown in the animal's fine, soft hair, pliable skin, refinement of bone and clean cut features about the head and neck. Quality also refers to smoothness and mellowness of fleshing.

## SUBSTANCE

Substance refers to the size of bone and amount of natural muscling.



Know body parts

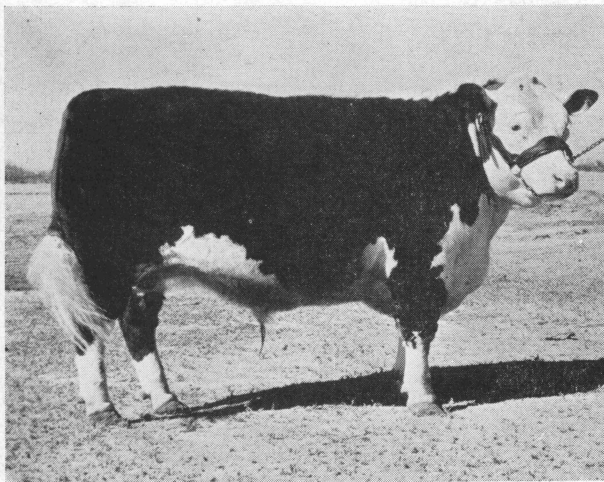
## SOUNDNESS

Soundness indicates freedom from blemishes due to disease, accident, or heredity.

## COMPARATIVE REASONS

Be able to support your decisions with comparative reasons. The terms used should be comparative as well as descriptive. "Good", "Better", "Best" are not descriptive or comparative. It is not sufficient to say that one steer's back is *better* than another's. It is straighter, wider, or more thickly fleshed.

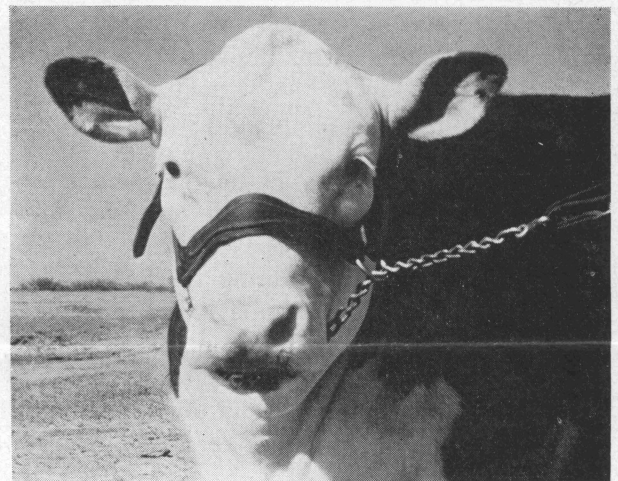
Reasons need not be long and numerous, but should be definite, concise, and to the point. Reasons should show that accurate observations, comparisons and proper evaluations were made.



Have a perfect animal in mind.

Knowing the names of body parts is the first essential in learning to judge. Be able to apply the proper comparative terms to the names of these body parts in making your comparison between animals.

In general appearance (lower left) the fat steer as viewed from the side is nearly rectangular, with great depth and medium length. The top line should be level and parallel with the under line. He should have short legs, a short head and neck. From this side view one should look for length and depth of body, length and setting of legs, straightness of top and under line, depth of fore and rear flanks, length of rump,



Good head

depth of quarters, length of neck, blending of neck into shoulders, side view of head, general balance, condition and smoothness. General comparative terms would include balance, symmetry, low set, thick, deep, compact, blocky, beefy, meaty, smooth, shorter coupled, and growthy. General comparative terms used in criticizing would include such terms as: Lacks balance, rangy, shallow, angular, upstanding, leggy, lacks development, plain, small, rough, and coarse.

The head should be of medium size, moderately short and broad. The nostrils should be large. The eyes should be bright, clear and indicative of a quiet disposition. The ears should be of medium size. The entire head should be clean cut, all lines being sharply defined, giving a well balanced appearance, some-

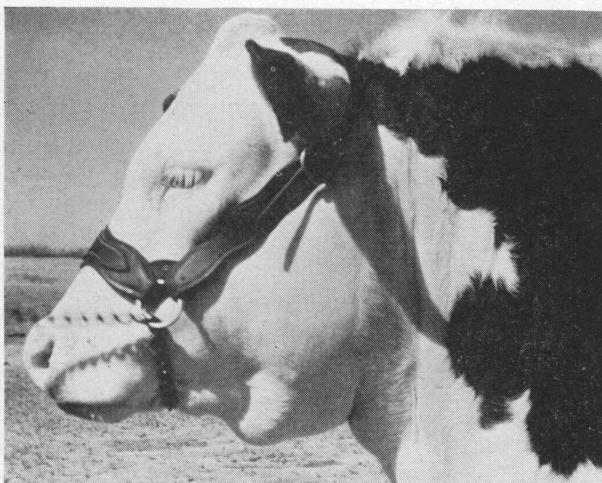


Staggy head

times referred to as "character." Desirable terms would include a bright eye, refined head or shows alertness about the head. Critical terms include such statements as dull eyes, staggy head, coarse headed, plain headed, Roman nosed, long and narrow headed.

A typical staggy head may also be described as being coarse and long from eyes to muzzle.

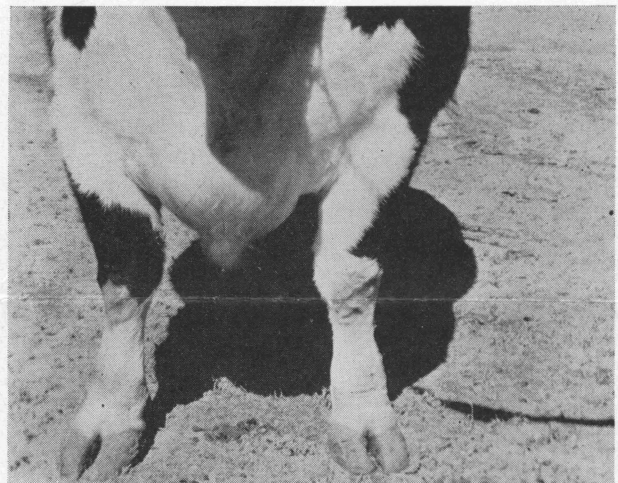
The head as viewed from the side should show jaws to be broad and well muscled. When the animal is standing in a natural position the head should be slightly up and on a level with top line of the neck with the poll of the head slightly higher than the top of the shoulders.



Good sideview of head and neck

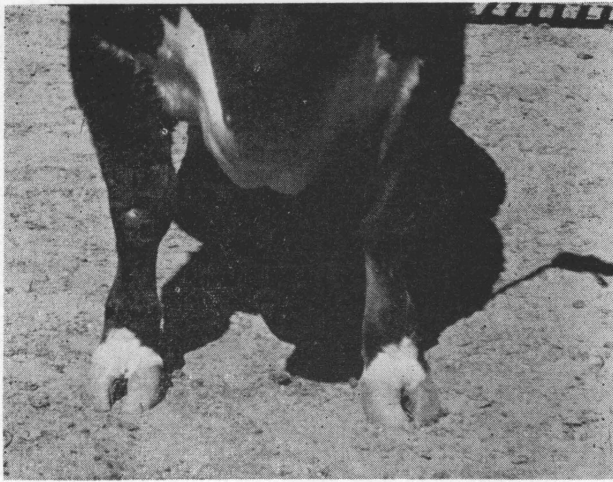
From the side the neck should be short, thick, and muscular, blending smoothly into the shoulder. The throat should be neat and trim.

The front legs should be short, set well apart and placed squarely under the animal. They should come straight down with toes pointing straight forward. Too much width is never found provided it is not due to prominent open shoulders which sets the forelegs wide apart. The forearm should be wide and muscular at its attachment to the shoulder. Refinement of



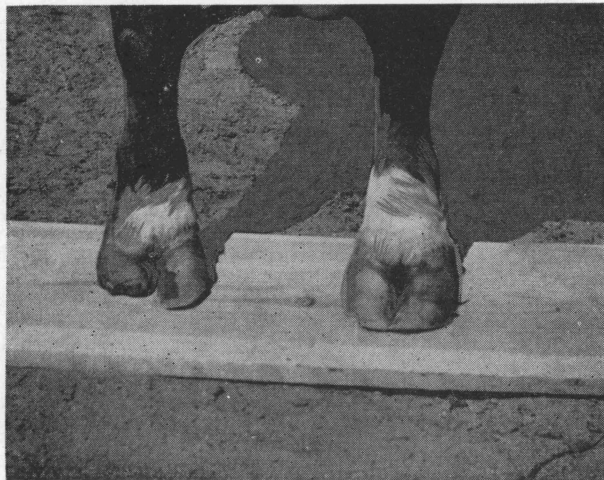
Front legs and brisket

bone and cleanness of joints are evidence of quality. Rough coarse animals have heavy joints and big shank bones. Constitution is determined largely by width and fullness of chest, spring of forerib and fullness of heart girth. The brisket should carry forward, wide, and be well fleshed, presenting a well developed but neat and trim appearance. A very wide, full, and deep chest with large heart girth generally indicates constitutional vigor. Although this steer's legs are set fairly well apart he may be criticized for not having straightness of legs and feet (above.)



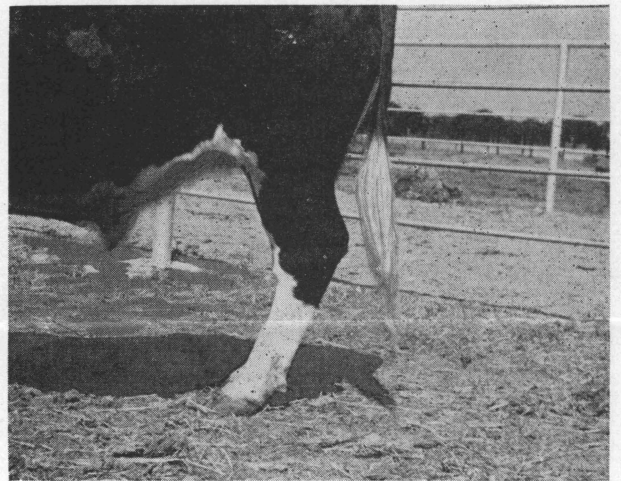
**Straight legs**

Straighter front legs and feet with more width between the legs are more evident here than in the previous steer. Other comparative terms which may be used in talking about the forelegs and brisket would include such statements as: Steer shows more refinement about the brisket, stands straighter on front legs, and stands more correctly on legs. Critical comparative terms could be: A heavy fronted steer, throaty steer, toes out, toes in, bowlegged, knock kneed, calf kneed, buck kneed, lacks width and depth of chest, and lack constitution and vigor.



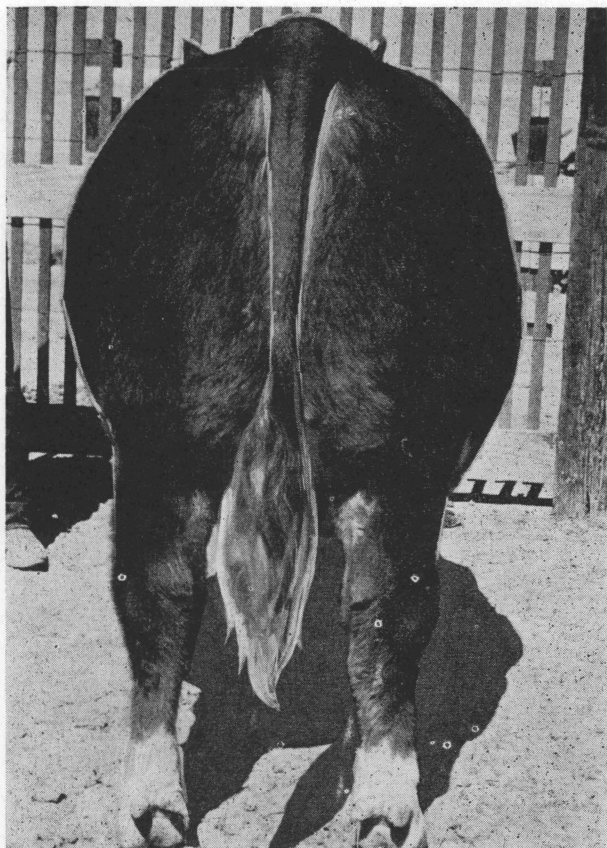
**Feet**

Not all bad legs and feet are inherited. Probably more often the case could be attributed to management factors. Most likely if the toe on the left were allowed to stay in this condition, this animal would eventually show crooked legs and feet (lower left.)



**Sickle Hocked**

The shortness and straightness of hind legs should be comparable to those qualities desired in the forelegs. This position of standing on the hind legs is usually referred to as "sickle hocked". This buckled under condition is objectionable. The legs should be squarely under the animal.



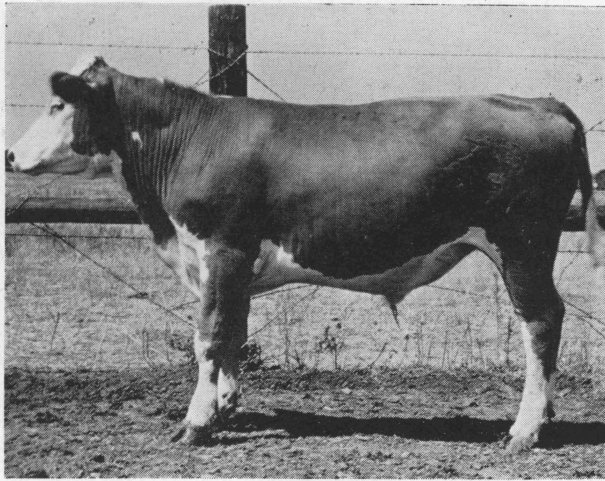
Hind legs

As viewed from the rear we are still looking for the rectangular appearance. We almost have that here but the hock joints are pointing slightly inward with the toes pointing outward. Comparative terms used to discuss the hind legs consist of such statements as: Stands more desirably on legs, straighter on legs, or squarer on legs. Critical comparative terms are: Rough at the hocks, hocky, meaty hocks, postlegged, sickle hocked, cow hocked, bowlegged, and pigeon toed.



Good rear view

Keep this picture in mind. It closely approaches what we are looking for from the rear view. The legs are set well apart and straight. The hocks and hind legs, by their position, indicate the capacity for fleshing in the twist. If the hocks are straight and properly placed, showing no special tendency to come together, they will be associated usually with more heavily fleshed hind quarters than otherwise. The shanks should carry straight down, and, as in front they should be short and show refinement in bone.

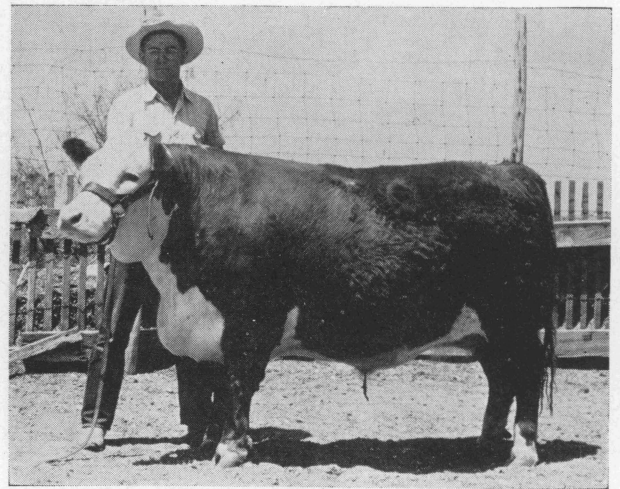


Leggy steer

This is a beef steer but it is far from the ideal beef type. This steer is standing too high off the ground and is termed "leggy". An animal showing too much length of middle is referred to as "rangy". This one can not be placed in that class.

In addition to his upstanding or legginess, we could say that he is shallow, angular and lacks development of hind quarter and is very plain. He does not have the level top line and parallel under line with lots of depth between the two which we are looking for in beef type. He indicates that he does not have the spring of ribs nor the width of body most desirable. We could say that he is pinched in the heart girth and if viewed from the front would not have the width between the forelegs. He is cut up high in both fore and rear flanks and certainly does not have fullness, thickness and depth of round.

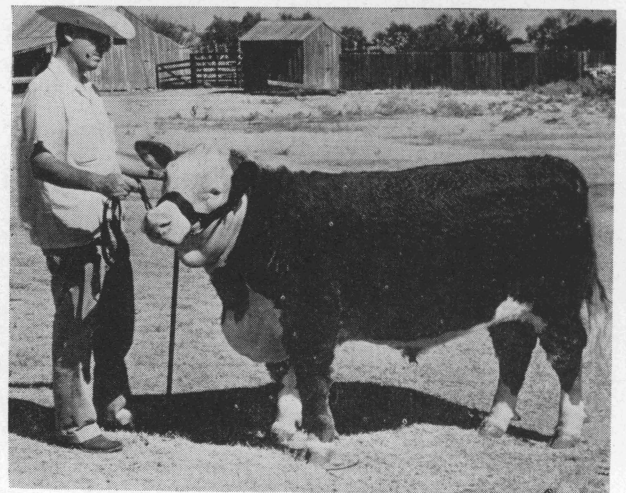
The steer at upper right is showing a lot of the qualities which we are looking for in beef type. In this picture he does not appear as strong and straight in the top line as desired. He may be criticized for being weak in the back and patchy around the tailhead. He shows a lot of quality in the head, has a short neck that blends smoothly into the shoulders which also



Type

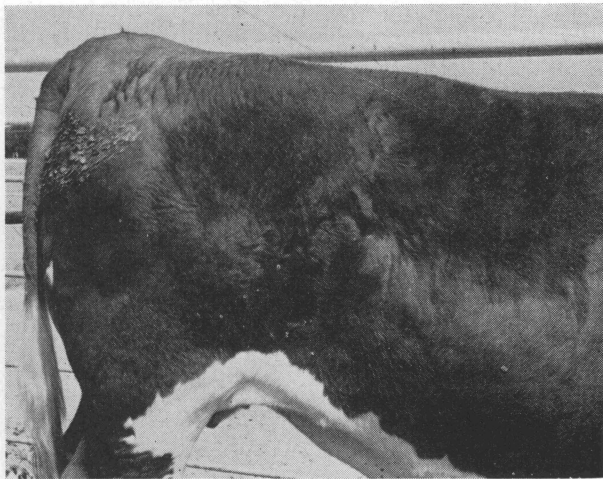
blends in with the rest of the body. In general, fat steers vary more in depth, width, and finish than in other essential qualities. Fullness in the round and fore and rear flanks contribute to uniformity in depth. A full middle is not necessarily an attribute to depth unless it is neatly carried and in harmony with general massiveness.

Below is another beef steer carrying a high degree of finish and exhibiting a lot of quality. From his appearance he looks as if he should have fine soft hair, pliable skin, medium sized bone, and firm finish. He is neat and trim with



Type





High tail setting

clean cut features about the head and neck. This steer can be criticized in ratio of his depth of body to length of body and possibly his length of legs.

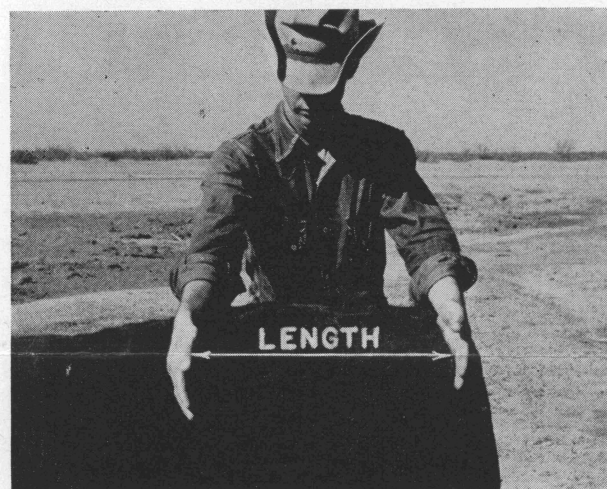
The high tail setting and peaked rump is undesirable. The rump is the top between the hips and tailhead. It should be level so as to carry out the topline straight and square to the end of the tailhead. It should be as long as possible. This is a long rumped steer. The width should be carried uniformly from hips to pin bones. Although the steer above is showing good length of rump he does not carry enough uniformity of width from hip bones to pin bones.



Drooped rump

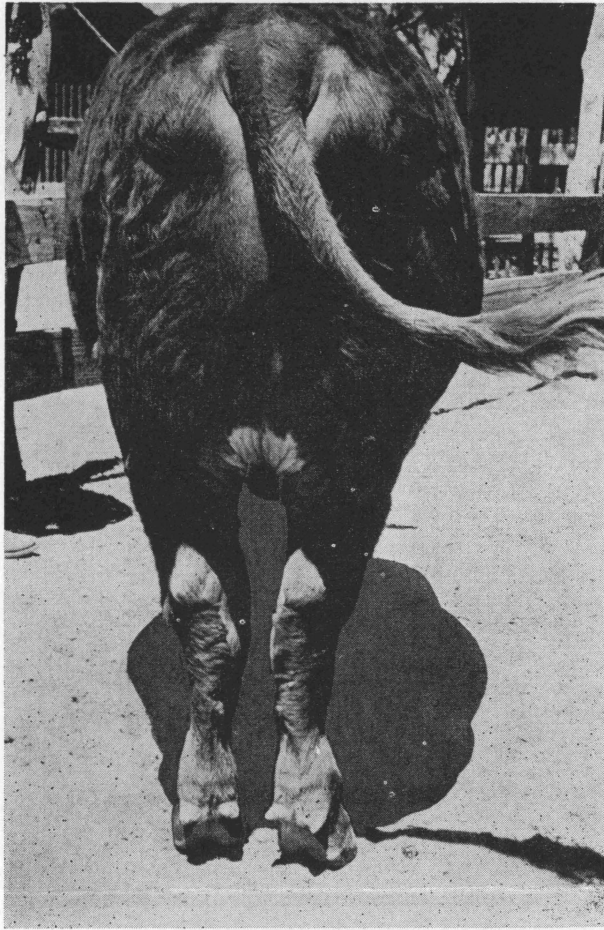
We could criticize him for not having the fullness and thickness of round that should carry close to the hock.

A drooped rump is undesirable. So is the patchiness around the tailhead. Here again the width is not carried uniformly and will not permit maximum fleshing (lower left.)



Length of rump

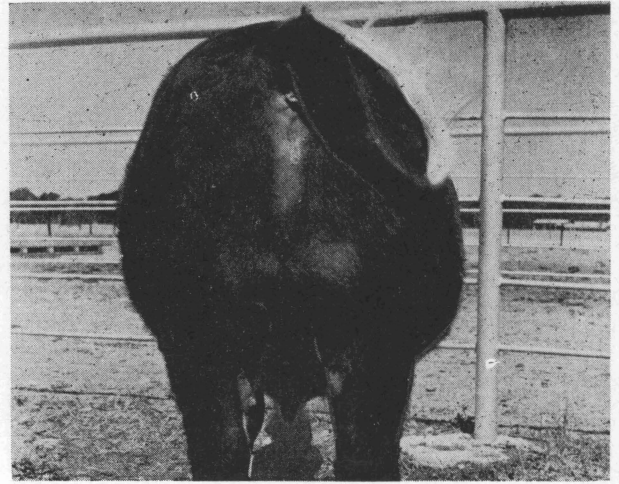
This steer may be criticized for not having enough length in the rump. On the other hand he is not patchy around the tailhead. Comparative terms to use in discussing the rump would include such terms as: Wider rump, and squarer in the rump. Critical terms would include: Peaked rump, drooping in the rump, wedgy at the rump, short in the rump, pinched at the tailhead, set up at the tailhead, rough at the tailhead, high at tailhead and patchy at the tailhead.



Objectionable rounds

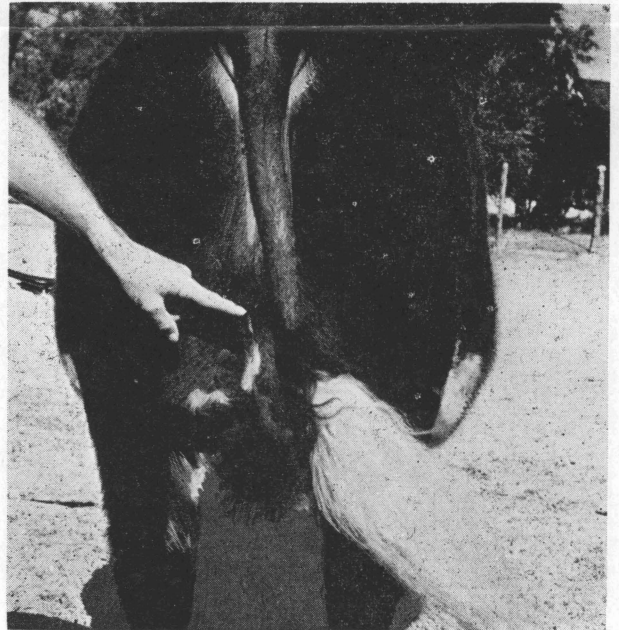
Fullness and thickness of rounds and depth of rounds is desirable. This steer is lacking in most of these qualities. The twist is the fleshing between the hind legs and should be very deep and full, filling in the space between the legs and carrying down as far as possible towards the hocks. Although this steer has good depth of twist he is lacking in width. We could criticize him for being drooped in the rump, patchy around the tailhead, not having a desirable width and not carrying his width in the hind quarters.

A very high twist is undesirable. Notice the distance from the bottom of the rounds to the hock joints (upper right.) Comparative terms used in discussing the twist and rounds would include: Deeper in twist, fuller in twist, heavi-



High twist

er in round, fuller in rounds, thicker in rounds, plumper in rounds, deeper quartered, and heavier in quarters. Critical terms are: Cut up in the twist, light in rounds, and plump rounds but lacking in depth.



Deep and full twist

Here is a desirable rear view to remember. This desirable rump carries out level to the tailhead. The thigh is full at every point, and gen-

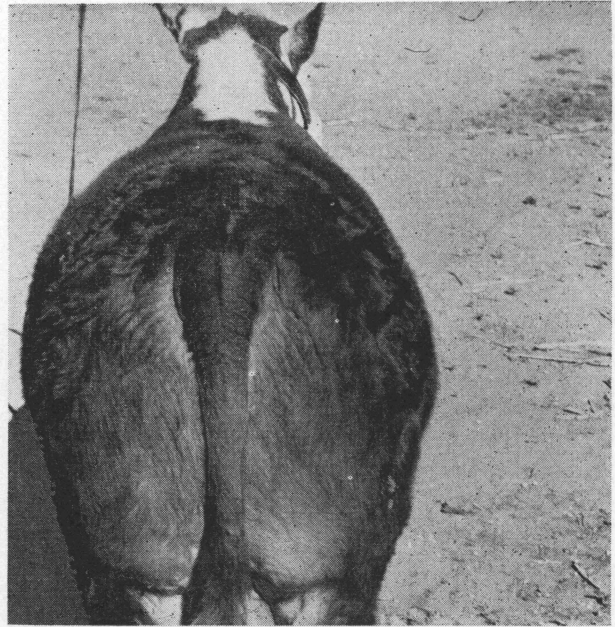
erally shows bulge in all lines. It carries closely to the hock which is sometimes referred to as "the leg getting into the round quickly". This very deep and full twist gives general thickness to the entire rear quarters.



Topline

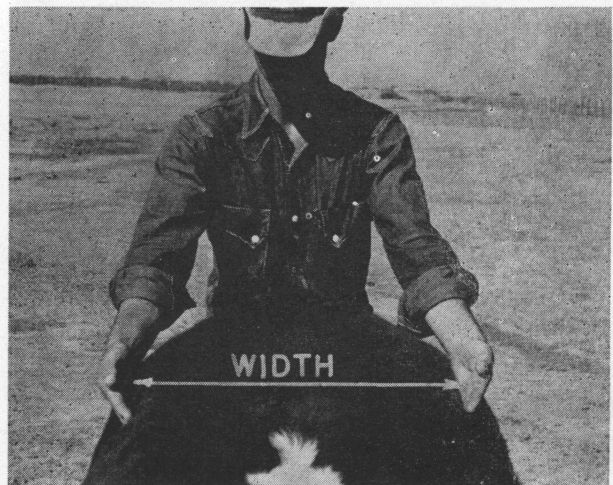
The top line should be rectangular having the same thickness through the shoulder area as through the hip bone area. This triangular shape is undesirable in beef type. Not only is this steer triangular from rear toward fore quarters but is also triangular from hocks to pins and from top line to ground level. Critical terms to use in discussing the top line would be: Coarse shouldered, rough shouldered, open on top of shoulders, lacks spring of rib, or pinched in the crops, long bodied, sags in the back, low in the back, weak in the back, weak in the loin, flat and weak at the loin, and bare over back and loin.

Although this is not the most desirable (upper right) it shows such characteristics as smoother shoulders, more compact on top of shoulders, stronger topped, stronger in back,



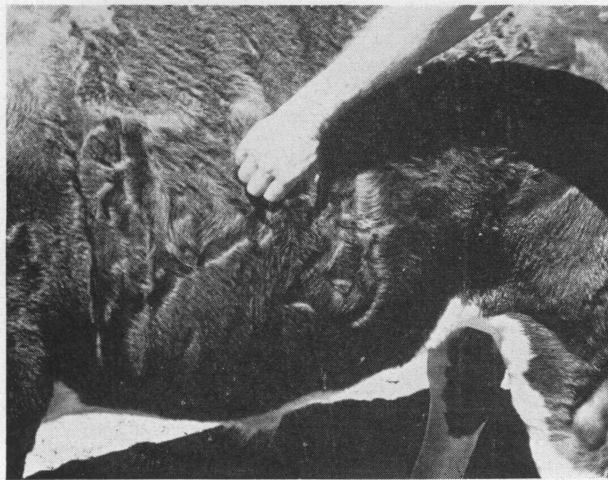
Strong Back

more spread through the crops, wider at the crops, thicker through the crops, wider topped, wider backed, more spring of ribs, more arch of rib and more spread over back.



Width of Loin

The loin is that portion of the top line between the last rib and the hips. This is the highest price cut of meat on the steer. Therefore, we want as much length, width and thickness as possible. The loin should be smooth along the edges and thickly fleshed. Critical



Soft pliable hide

terms are: flat and weak in the loin, narrow and dips at the loin, poorly finished over the loin, and lacking in length, thickness and width of loin.

One indication of quality is a soft, pliable hide. We sometimes describe these characteristics as thinner hided, and loose pliable hided. On the other hand, we may say that they are harsh to the touch, thick tight hided, heavy hided, and ropy hided.

As we look at the steer on the left (below), we can say that he is stronger in the top line, has more depth of body, is deeper and fuller in both rear and fore flanks, and is shorter of legs than the steer on the right.

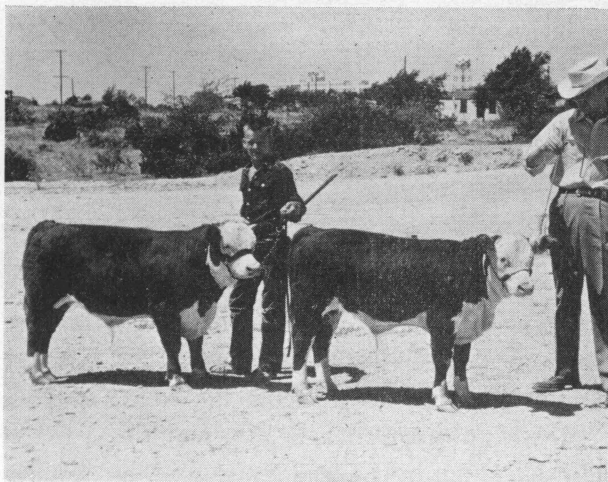
Viewing these same steers from the front, we see that the steer on the left is fuller and thicker



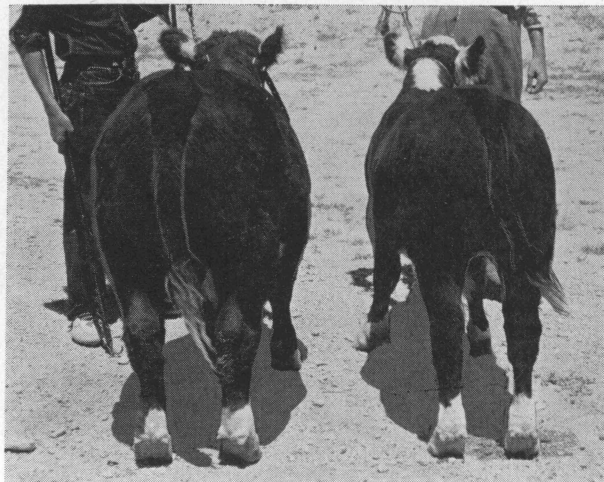
Front view

through the shoulders, is deeper in the chest, is broader muzzled, shorter from eyes to muzzle and broader between the eyes than the steer on the right. We would have to criticize both steers for not being as straight as desired on the fore legs.

As viewed from the rear (below), the steer on the left has a more desirable tail setting, is squarer in the rump, deeper in the twist, fuller in the rounds, and carries his width more uniformly from tail setting to the hocks. Although both steers are standing straight on their hind legs, the steer on the left may be criticized for not having the feet pointing straight forward. Therefore from these three views: Side, front and rear, we would place the one on the left first and the one on the right second.



Side view



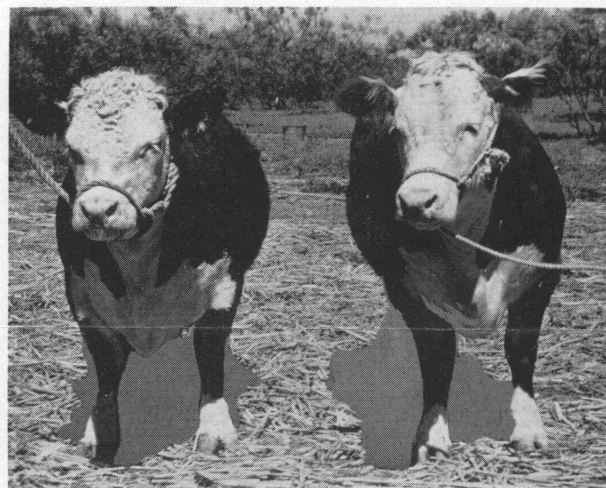
Rear view

You judge these two steers from the side view using comparative terms to back up your reasons.



Side view

Place these same two steers from the front view. Remember that “good”, “better”, and “best”, are not comparative.

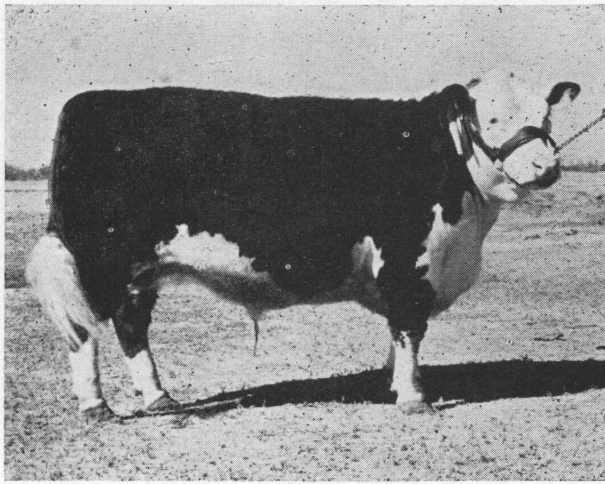


Front view

Judge these same two steers from the rear view. Now from memory of the side view, front view and this rear view, which steer do you place first? Be definite, concise and to the point.



Rear view

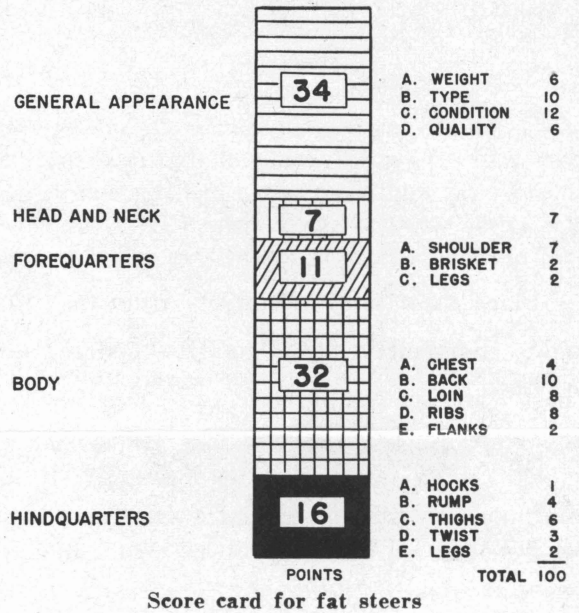


Judging an individual

To judge the fat steers' condition more accurately, it is necessary to handle them. This is done by pressing the parts to be examined with the open hand and fingers. Fingers are held together and extended. The following order may be used as a guide in handling: the top line, from the top of the shoulders back to the tailhead; the shoulder blades and points; the lower, upper, and rear rib; the loin edge; and the tailhead. The most common faults in condition are a deficiency in the amount of fat covering the loin, on top of the shoulders, and on the shoulder blades; lack of evenness of covering as shown by ties in the back, patchiness of fat on the back, rib and loin, and patchiness about the tailhead; and general lack of uniformity in

mellowness of covering. Other means of determining the condition consist of an examination or observation of the cod and rear flank. When a fat steer walks, there is a characteristic roll or swell to the flank as the hind leg swings forward.

This score card describes the ideal fat steer first in general and then in detail. It is important in judging to know which parts of the body should receive the most consideration. If you can apply the information given on this score card you will be a steer judge.



Information in this publication originally was prepared as a set of 2 x 2 slides. The colored slides (No. 222) are available on loan to county agricultural agents. They may be requested through the Extension visual aids specialist.



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