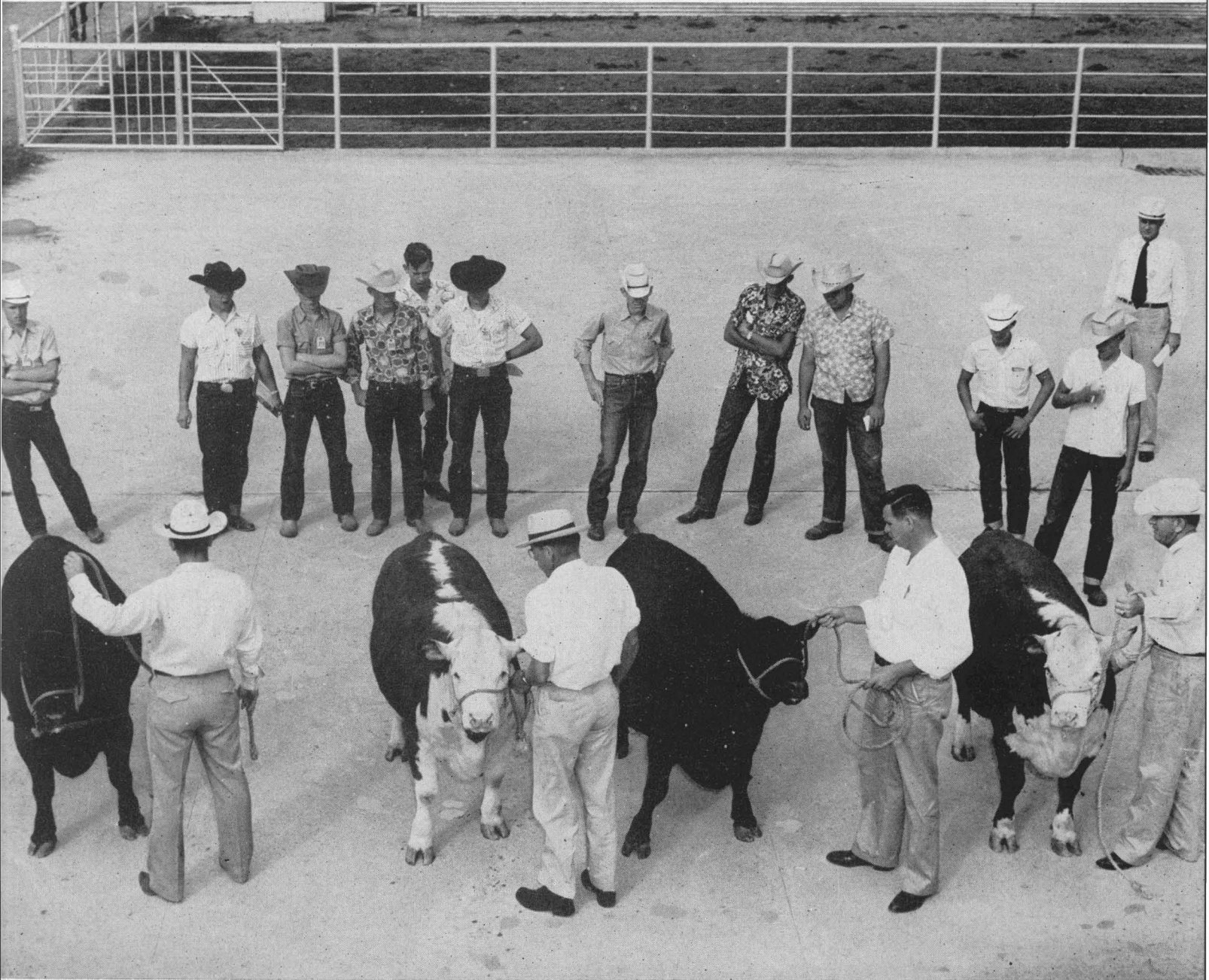


# Judging Fat Steers



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G. G. Gibson, Director, College Station, Texas





# 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 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

Quality is indicated by 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.

## **SOUNDNESS**

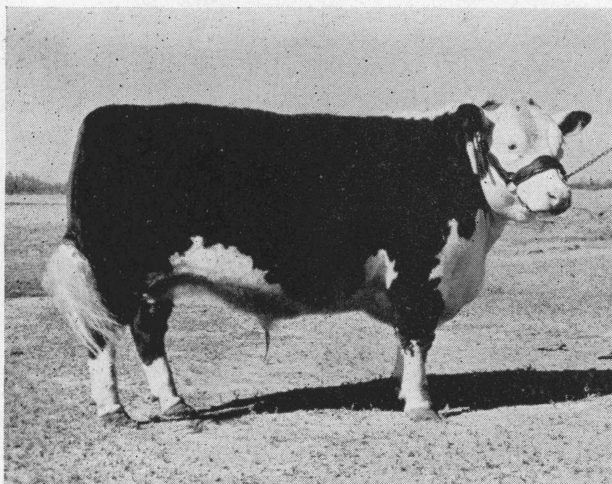
Soundness indicates freedom from blemishes due to disease, accident, or heredity.

## **COMPARATIVE REASONS**

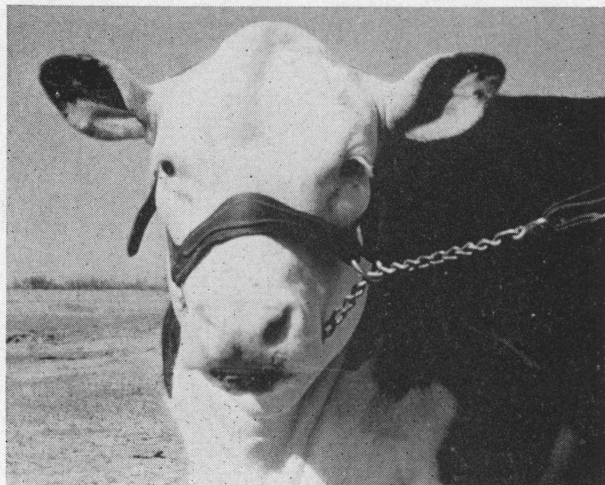
Be able to support your decisions with comparative reasons. The terms used should be comparative as well as descriptive. "Good," "Better," "Best" are not descriptive or comparative. It is not sufficient to say that one steer's back is better than another's. It is straighter, wider, or more thickly fleshed.

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

Knowing the names of body parts is the first essential in learning to judge. Be able to apply the proper comparative terms to the body



**Have a perfect animal in mind**



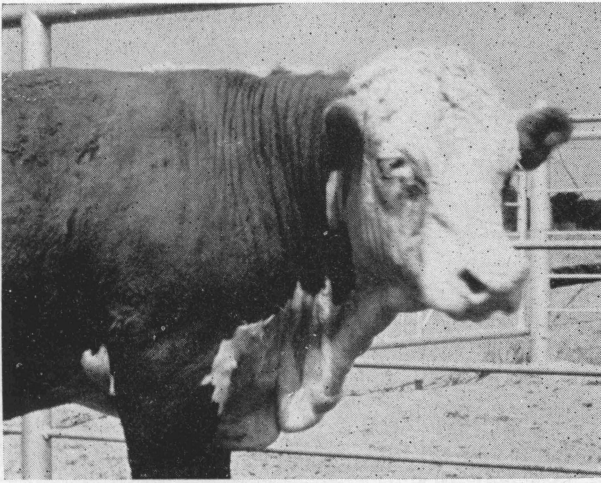
**Good head**

parts in making your comparison between animals. (See pages 8 and 9)

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. 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, 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 and finish, 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



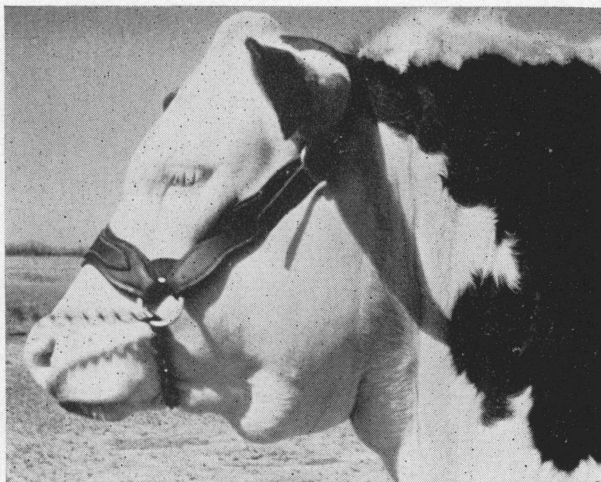


Staggy head

defined, giving a well balanced appearance, sometimes 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



Good sideview of head and neck

top line of the neck with the poll of the head slightly higher than the top of the shoulders. 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 bone and cleanness of joints are



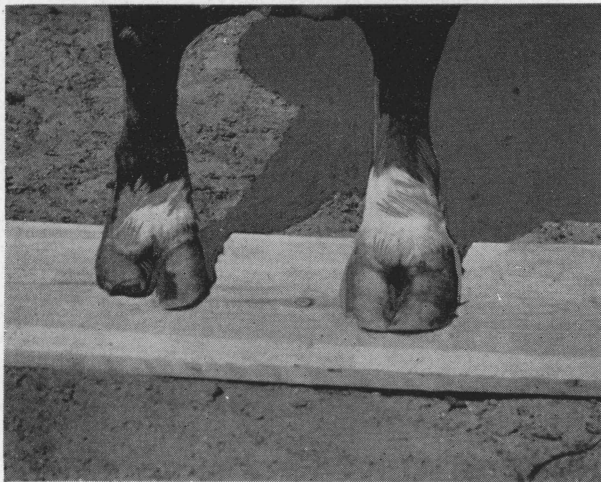
Front legs and brisket

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, and be wide and well fleshed, presenting a well developed but neat and trim appearance. A wide, full, and deep chest with large heart girth generally indicates constitutional vigor. In the above picture the steer's legs are set fairly well apart but could be straighter.



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 lacks 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.

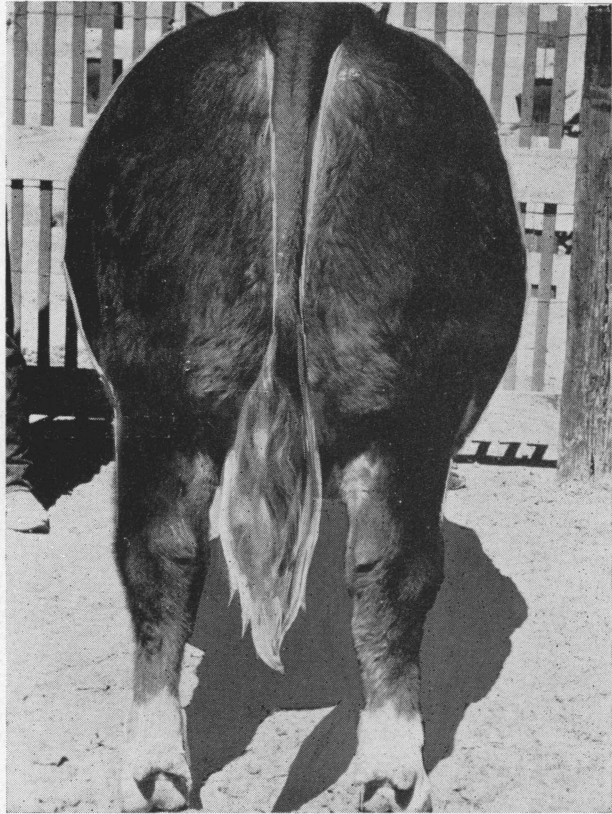


Sickle hocked

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

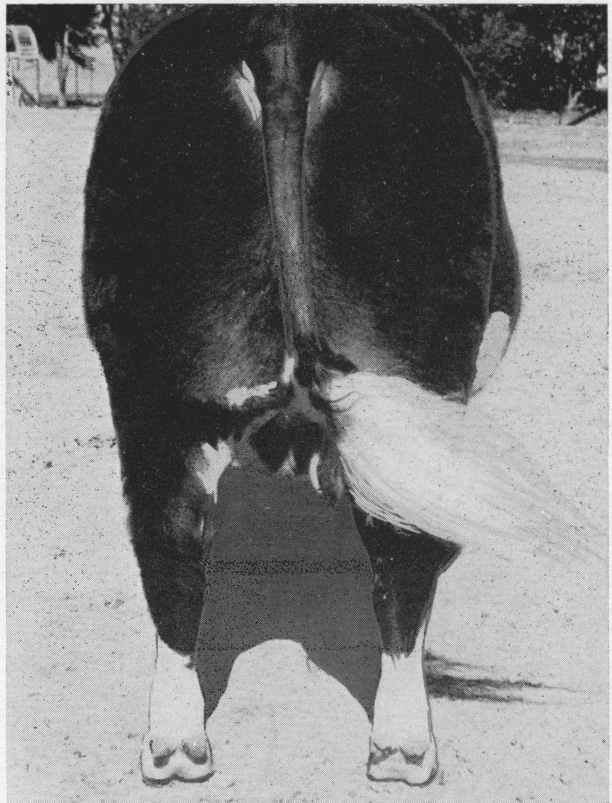


As viewed from the rear look for a rectangular appearance. We almost have that here but the hock joints are pointing slightly inward with the toes pointing outward. The hocks and shanks are rough and coarse. Comparative terms used to discuss the hind legs include such statements as: Stands more desirably on legs, straighter on legs, or squarer on legs. Critical comparative terms are: Rough at the hocks, meaty hocks, sickle-hocked, cow-hocked, bow-legged, and pigeon-toed.



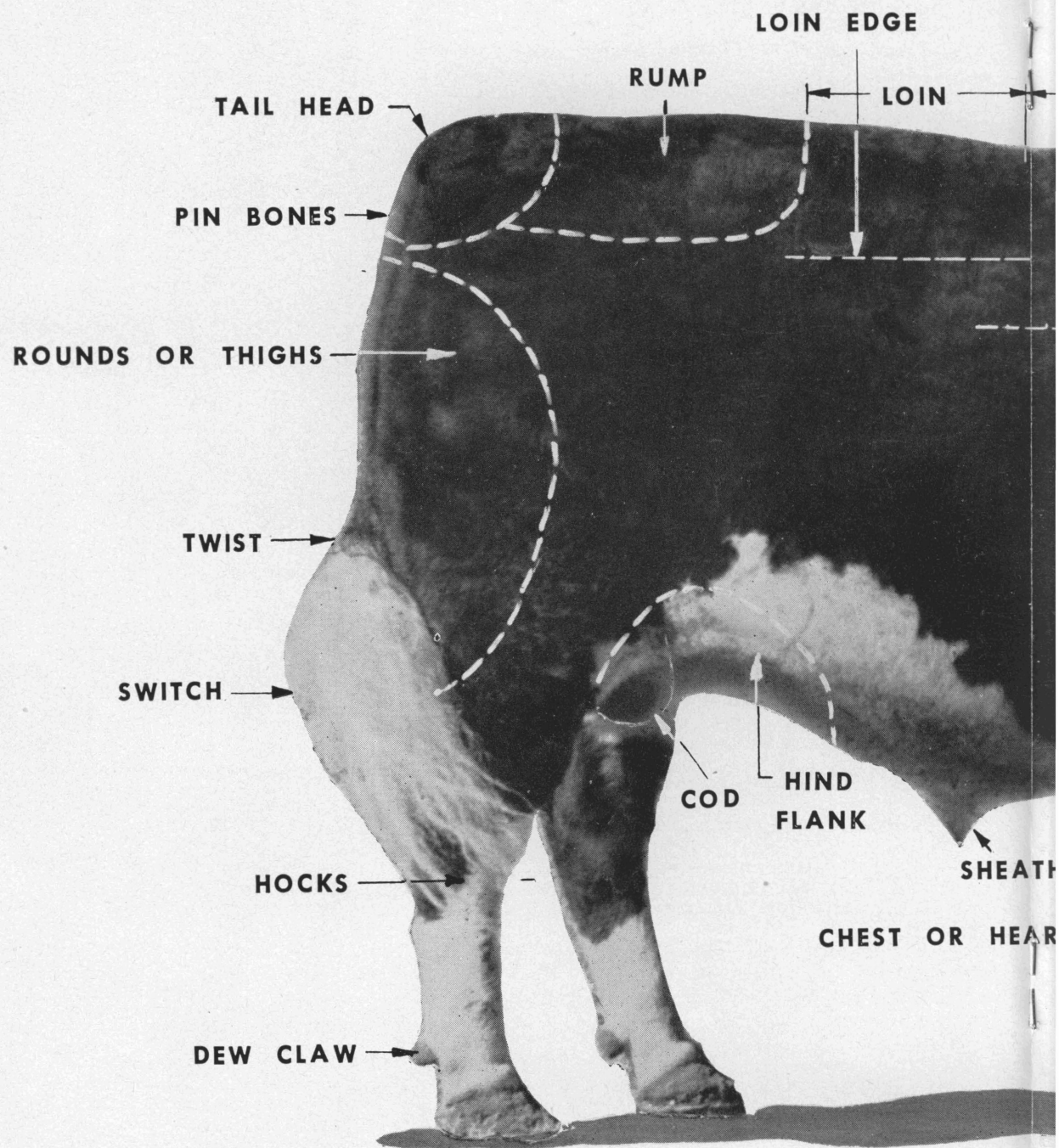
Hind legs

Keep this picture in mind. It closely approaches the ideal rear view. The legs are set well apart and straight. The hocks and hind legs, by their position indicating the capacity for fleshing in the twist. The shanks should carry straight down, and as in front, they should be short and show refinement in bone. Straight well placed hocks and legs are associated usually with more heavily fleshed hind quarters.



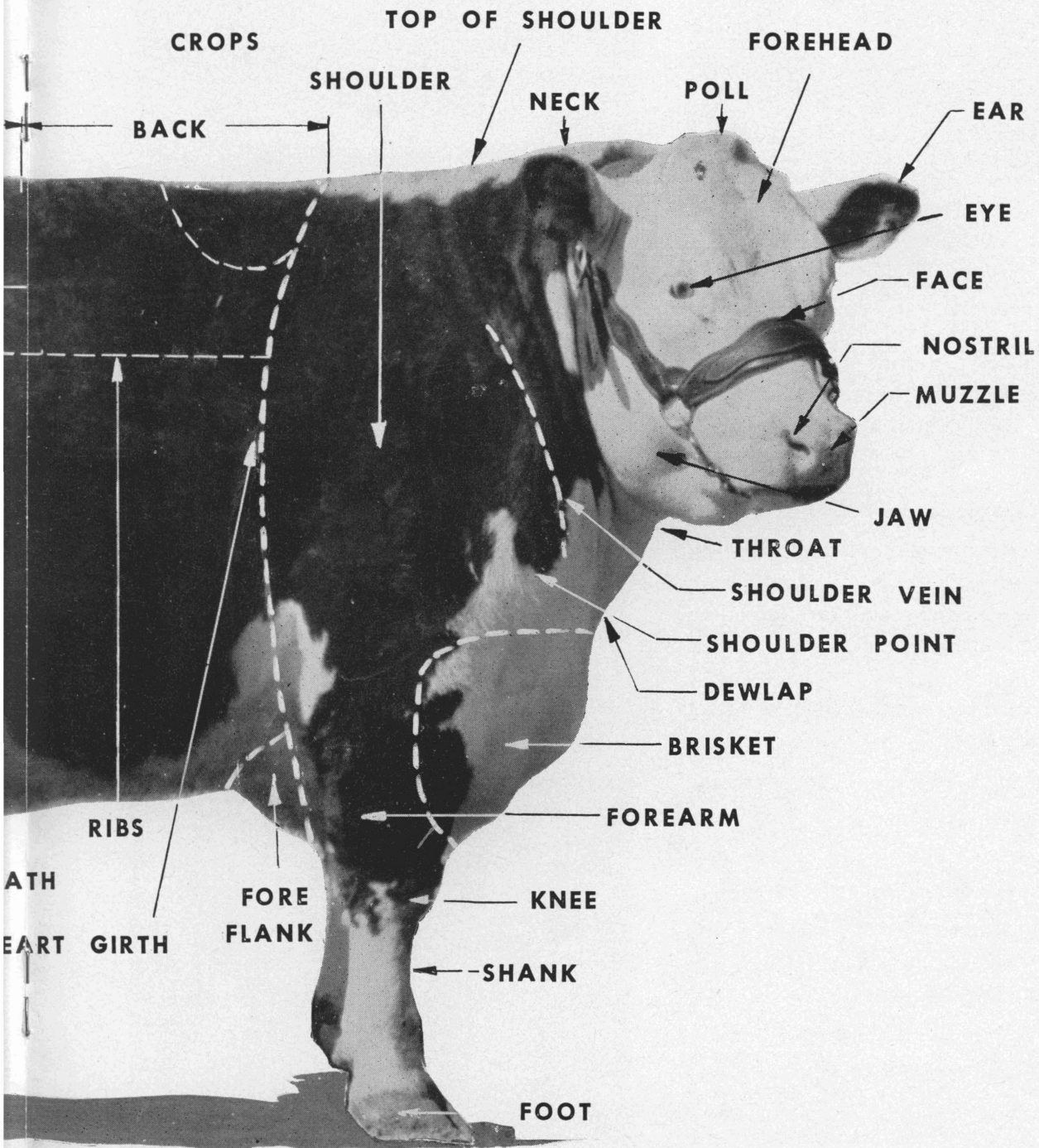
Good rear view

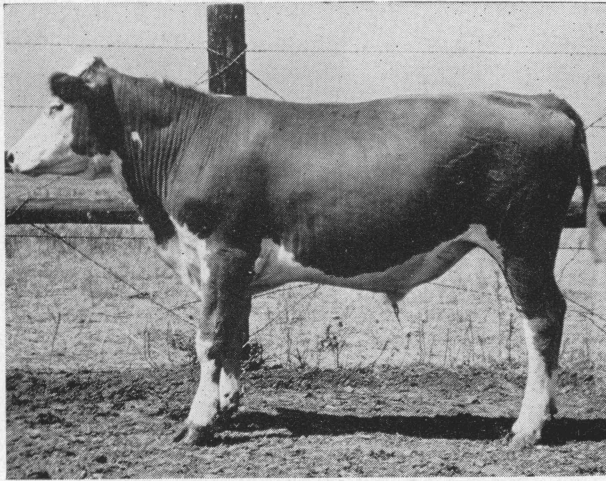
# KNOW B





# BODY PARTS



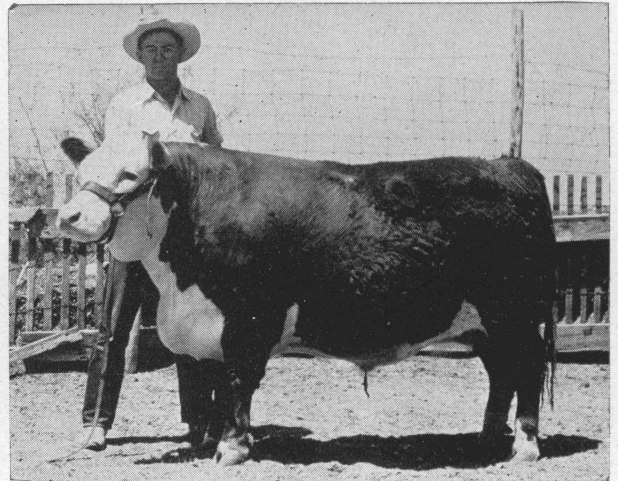


Leggy steer

This steer is far from the ideal beef type. He 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. He is shallow bodied, long necked, light in the rounds and is not fat. He does not have the spring of ribs nor the width of body most desirable. He is pinched in the heart girth and if viewed from the front would not have enough 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 is not 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 and too full in the middle. He shows quality in the head, has a short neck that blends smoothly into the shoulders which also blends in with the rest of the body. In general, fat steers vary more in depth, width, and finish than in other essential qualities.

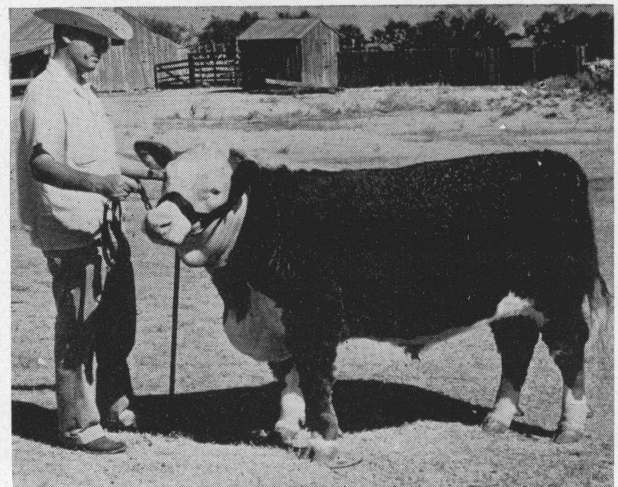
Fullness in the round, fore and rear flanks and middle contribute to uniformity in depth.



Type

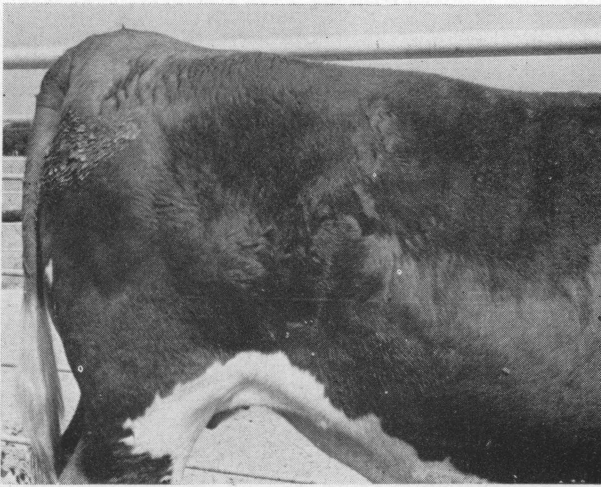
A full middle detracts from general appearance unless it is neatly carried and in harmony with general massiveness.

Below is a beef steer carrying a high degree of finish and showing a lot of quality. From his appearance he looks as if he should have fine soft hair, pliable hide and medium sized bone. He is neat and trim with clean cut features about the head and neck. This steer can be criticized for the lack of his depth of body to length of body. For this reason his general appearance is affected.

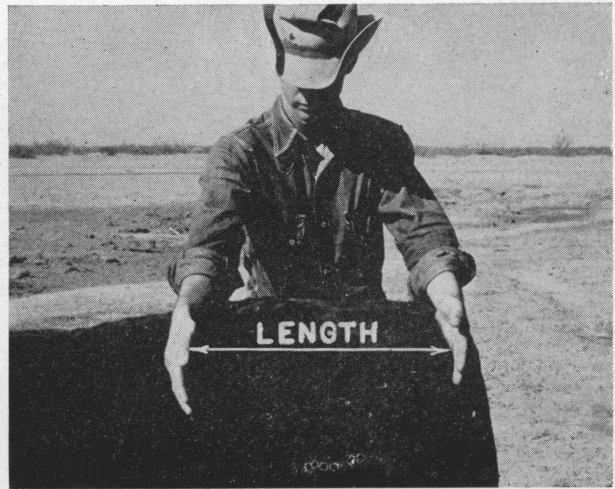


Finish





High tail setting



Length of rump

The high tail setting and peaked rump is undesirable. The rump is the top between the hips and tailhead. It should be level and wide and carry out the topline straight and square to the end of the tailhead. The width should be carried uniformly from hips to pin bones. Although the steer above is showing good length of rump he does not have uniform width from hip bone to pin bones. Observe the high flank and round.

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

You can see the lack of straightness of the topline. Several pounds of this higher price cut of meat may be lost due to this condition. Rumps that are straight, long, wide and deep will carry the greatest amount of fleshing.

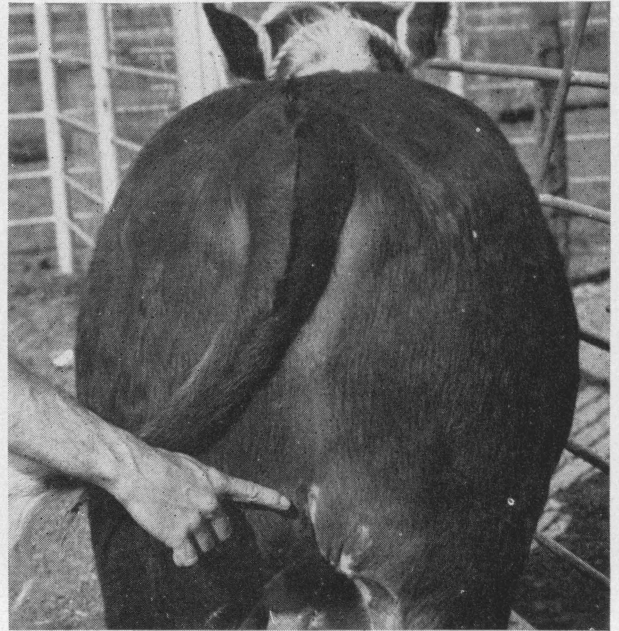
The length of rump is measured from hip bones to pin bones. A desirable length is in proportion with length of back. A rectangular appearance as indicated in the above picture approaches the ideal. Comparative terms to use in discussing the rump would include such as: Wider rump, more level and squarer in the rump. Critical terms would include: Peaked rump, drooping in the rump, short in the rump, pinched at the tailhead, rough at the tailhead, high at tailhead and patchy around the tailhead.



Drooped rump



Deep and full twist

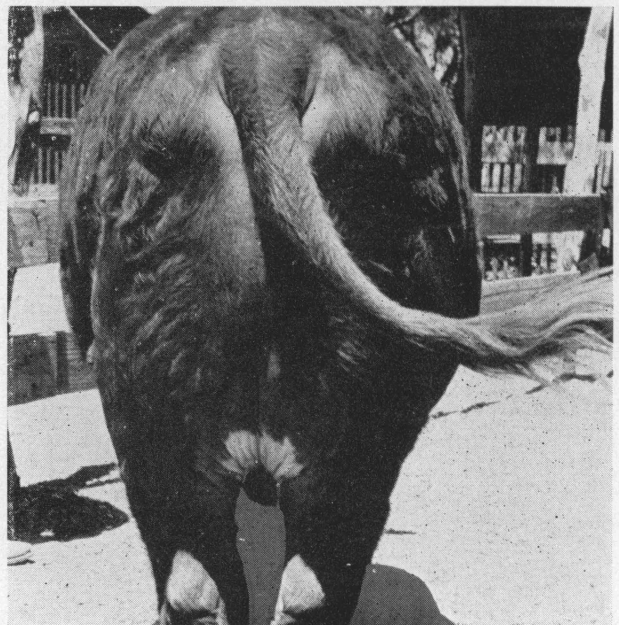


High twist

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

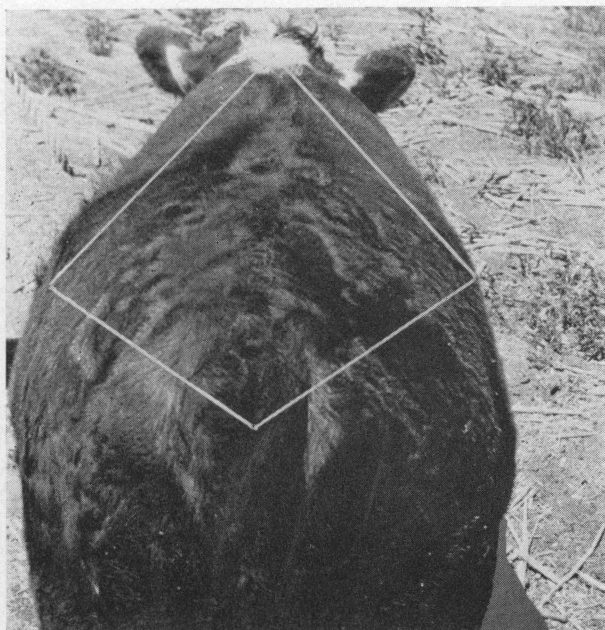
Here is a desirable rear view to remember. This desirable rump carries out level to the tailhead. The thigh is full at every point. It carries closely to the hock which is sometimes referred to as "the leg getting into the round quickly." The deep and full rounds, and deep, full twist gives general thickness to the entire rear quarters.

Fullness and thickness of rounds and depth of rounds is desirable. This steer is lacking in these qualities. The twist is the fleshing between the hind legs and should be

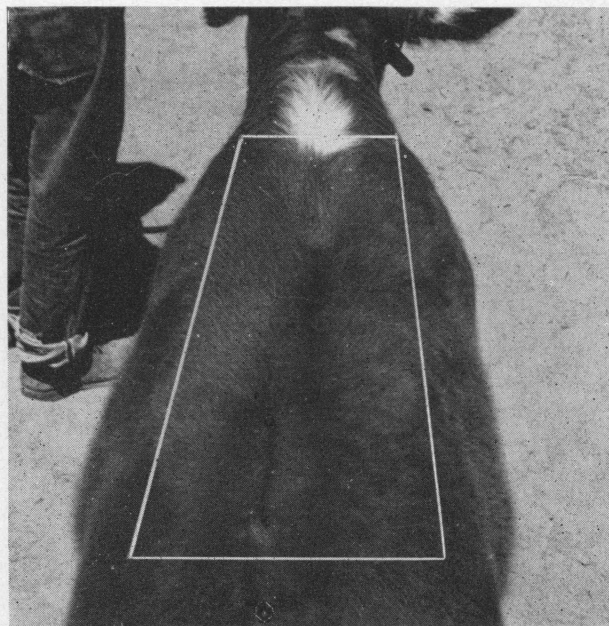


Objectionable rounds





Triangular back



Rectangular back

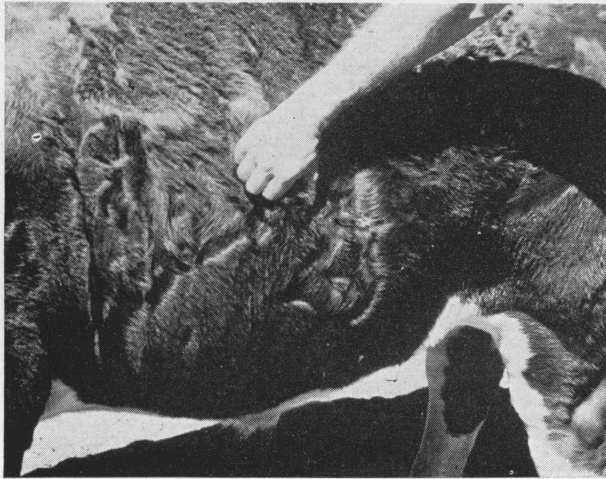
The back should be rectangular having almost the same thickness through the shoulder area as through the hip bone area. This triangular shape is undesirable in beef type. Not only is this steer triangular from rear toward fore quarters but is also triangular from hooks to pins. Critical terms used in discussing the back are: Coarse shouldered, rough shouldered, open on top of shoulders, lacks spring of rib, or pinched in the crops, 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 may not be the most desirable back (upper right) it shows such characteristics as smoother shoulders, more compact on top of shoulders, stronger topped, stronger in 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.

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 and thickly fleshed. Critical 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.



Width of Loin



Soft pliable hide

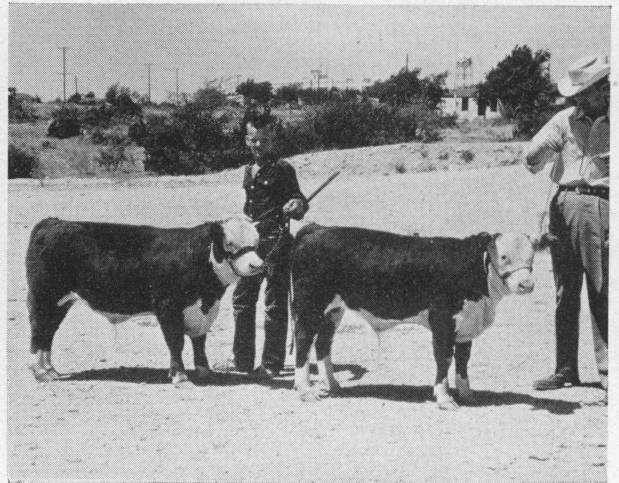
One indication of quality is a soft, pliable hide. We sometimes describe these characteristics as thinner hidéd, and loose hidéd. We may say that they are harsh to the touch, thick tight hidéd, heavy hidéd, and ropy hidéd.

### COMPARING TWO STEERS

As we look at the steer on the left (above), we can say that he is stronger in the top line, has more depth of body, fatter and is deeper and fuller in both rear and fore flanks 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 through the shoulders, is deeper in the chest, 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.

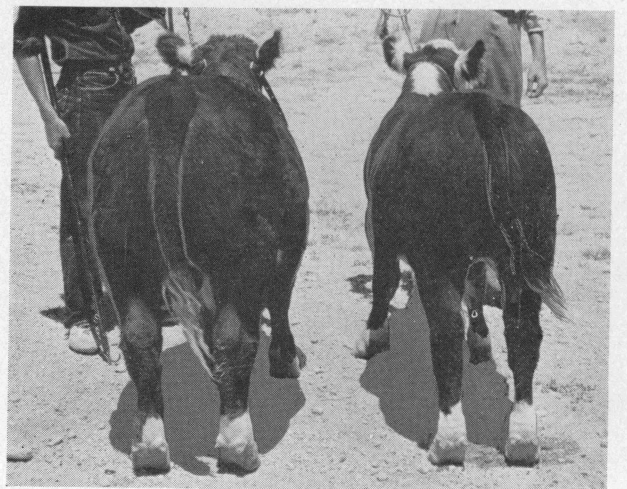
As viewed from the rear, the steer on the left has a more desirable tail setting, is squarer in the rump, deeper in the twist, fuller in the rounds, and carries his width more uniformly from tail setting to the hocks. Therefore from these three views: Side, front and rear, we would place the one on the left first and the one on the right second.



Side view



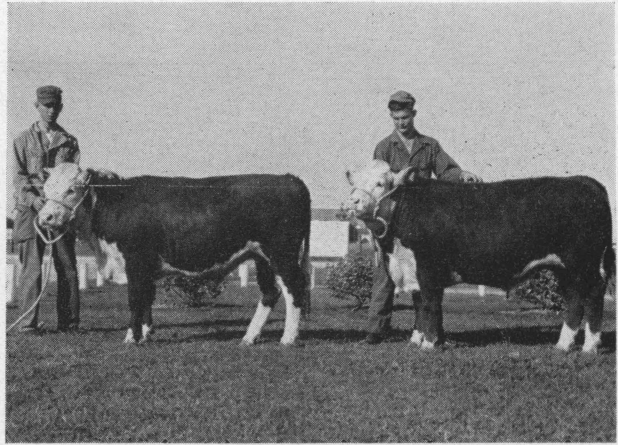
Front view



Rear view



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



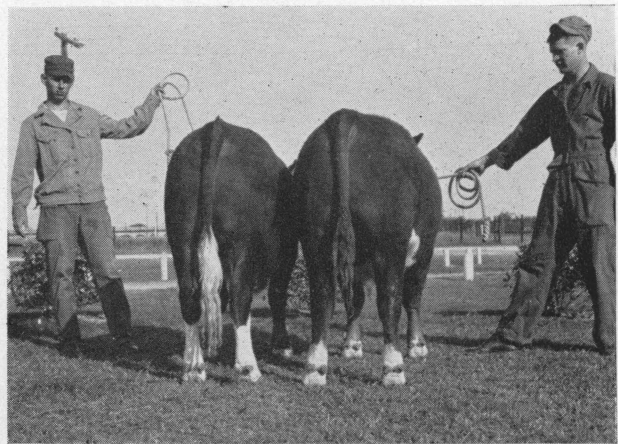
Side view

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

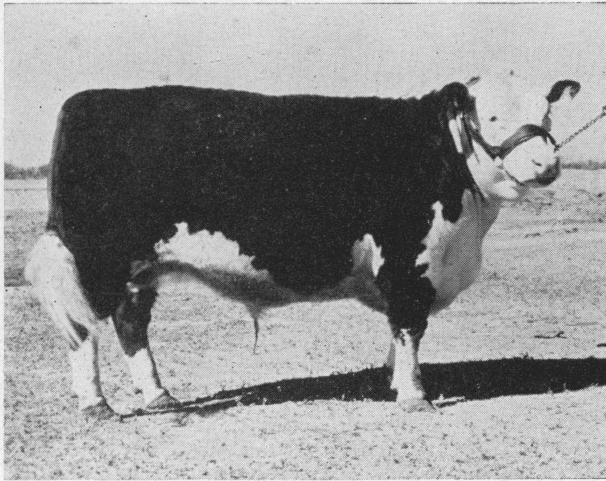


Front view

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

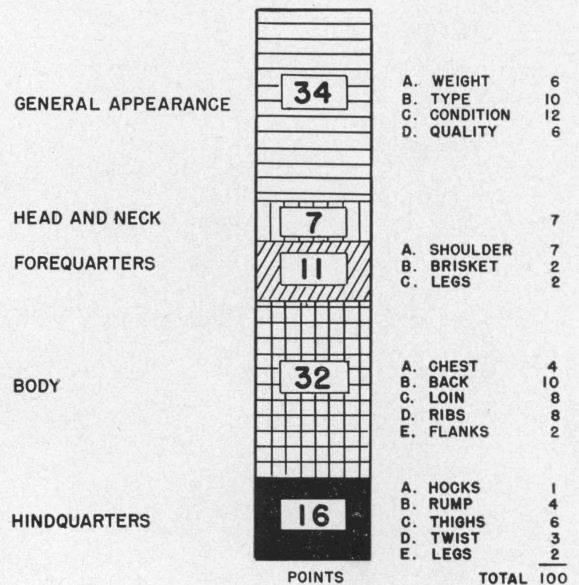


Judging an individual

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 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.



Score card for fat steers

Information in this publication originally was prepared as a set of 2x2 slides. The colored slides (No. 222) are available on loan to county agricultural agents. They may be requested through the Extension visual aids specialist.