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The Market Steer Guide to Success

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Considerations for Selecting a Steer

The most important thing to consider when selecting a market steer is the date of your county fair. The average steer will be finished between 14 and 18 months of age. A steer that is to be shown in the summer months will generally be born between February and May and purchased in the fall after being weaned.

Other considerations include confirmation and breed of the animal. When considering confirmation it is important to think about structural correctness, muscle shape and definition, depth of body, frame size and overall balance. The breed of your steer is also important as some breeds are earlier maturing, steers that will be finished at a younger age (example: Angus, Hereford) and some are later maturing, steers that will be finished at an older age (example: Simmental, Charolais). Below is a figure identifying some important points to look for when selecting a market steer.

Clipping

Clipping of a market steer’s hair will have the most significant impact on his appearance. While clipping will not actually change the confirmation of the animal, when done correctly it can enhance the steer’s overall appearance.

- **Topline:** Shave the long hairs to create a level look across the top.
- **Neck:** Shave all long hair off of the top. Blend the base of the neck into the topline.
- **Face:** Shave completely going against the natural direction of the hair.
- **Tail:** Shave from the top of the twist straight up to the top of the tail to create a square look.
- **Bristet/Neck:** Shave completely going against the natural direction of the hair.
- **Underside:** Blend the hair between brisket and stomach. Shave the sheath completely. Shave long hairs to create an even underline.

Show Day Preparation

Start your show day preparation by washing and blow drying your steer. Once your steer has completely dried you may begin fitting him for the show. Start by combing and blowing the hair as shown in figure 3 on the previous page. You may choose to use adhesive on your steer’s legs. Start at the hoof and spray a light amount of adhesive on the hair then comb in an upward motion. Repeat as necessary for all four legs. Create a rectangular look by using adhesive to shape your steer’s tailhead into a point. Upon completion of the show be sure to remove all hair products from your steer’s hair.
Preparing a Market Steer for Show

Halter Breaking

It is best to start halter breaking your market steer as soon as you get him if he is not already halter broke. First, allow your steer to adjust to his new surroundings. To begin halter breaking, put a halter on your steer, making sure the nose band is on the upper third of his nose. Allow your steer to drag the halter for a day or two. Once your steer experienced resistance on the rope, tie him up at eye level using a slip knot. Remain with your steer while he is tied up. Continue tying your steer up every day for 30 minutes at a time until he is comfortable standing there. While your steer is standing start brushing him, rubbing him and talking to him.

To teach your steer to lead, use the pull, release and reward method. Start by putting pressure on the halter, if the steer moves towards you favorably slightly reduce the pressure. Continue moving forward rewarding your steer by reducing the pressure on the halter with each favorable step. Repeat this method everyday for a week and your steer should start to lead with ease.

Preparing at Home

Practice showing your steer every day. To train your steer’s hair for show day it is important to rinse and blow dry your steer daily. Rinsing daily will also help cool your steer during the summer months. A conditioner may be useful for keeping the hair healthy. Follow the figures below when combing your steers hair after rinsing, then blow dry the hair in the same direction as Figure 3. Following these steps will help train your steer’s hair for show day.

Meat Quality Assurance

A quality assurance program is a program designed to help livestock producers raise their animals in a way that will provide a safe and wholesome product for the consumer.

As a 4-H livestock producer it is your responsibility to produce a safe food product while caring for your animals in an ethical manner. Proper handling and management of your livestock project is essential to the quality of the final product. Be consistent in your feeding regimen and handle animals in a quiet, gentle manner. Keep accurate and complete records and maintain a healthy animal. When treatment or injections are necessary for animal health read the label, administer properly, adhere to withdrawal times, give injects in the neck and keep accurate records. Be sure to consult your veterinarian for vaccination and treatment options.

A high-quality, safe, wholesome food product is the goal of every livestock producer. Make sure you are doing your part by raising your 4-H market project in a safe and ethical manner. Below are some examples of humane and inhumane practices.

Humane Practices
- Feed a balanced ration
- Provide plenty of clean water
- Follow a planned health and vaccination program
- Keep animal in a warm dry place that is adequately ventilated and well bedded
- Start training animals at a young age

Inhumane Practices
- Lack of animal grooming
- Failure to feed and water animals regularly
- Failure to keep pen and stalls clean and dry
- Kicking, kneeing, beating, jerking, or slapping an animal in ring
- Improper medicating of animals
How to Feed a Market Steer

Successful market steer projects are based on the availability of the steer’s nutritional requirements. You will need to feed your steer both roughages (hay) and concentrates (grains). There are two feeding phases for market steers, the growing phase and the finishing phase. It is important to know what the phases are and when to move your steer from a growing phase to a finishing phase.

**Phase 1: Growing Phase**

The growing phase is a time when roughages are utilized to allow for frame growth. A growing phase diet typically consists of grass hay or pasture and minimal concentrates. During this time steers will typically gain 1.75 lb to 2.50 lbs per day depending on the diet consumed. Typically when a steer reaches approximately 800-850 lbs it is time to move the steer to the finishing phase; however you will need to make sure you take into account the date of your county fair and your fair’s weight limits on steers before starting a finishing ration.

**Transitioning from Phase 1 to Phase 2**

Steers that have been grown on a roughage based diet will need to gradually be introduced to concentrates using a series of “step-up” diets. This will help ensure a smooth transition into the finishing phase that avoids over consumption of concentrates and a sick steer.

Below is a chart to show what the average daily feed intake is based on the size of the steer. Remember to divide the average daily feed intake by two to account for a morning and an evening feeding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steer Weight (lbs)</th>
<th>Average Daily Gain (lbs)</th>
<th>Average Daily Feed Intake (lbs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>10.5-11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>12-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>19-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>23-26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The transition period will take approximately 21-28 days. Each step should last for a 3-7 days. If your steer goes off feed it may be necessary to go back a step before continuing on. The following is a suggested four week series of “step-up” diets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>% Concentrate</th>
<th>% Roughage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Free Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phase 2: Finishing Phase**

The finishing phase is a time when high levels of concentrates are utilized for fat deposition. The days on a finishing ration can range between 120-160 days depending on the frame size, muscle thickness and breed of the steer. The longer the steer is on a finishing ration the less efficient he will be in feed conversion; however you want to feed your steer until he is finished.

The finishing diet should consist of approximately 80% concentrates and 20% roughages. Crude Protein levels in a finishing diet should be 12%.

Remember that it is much easier to maintain a steer’s weight than it is to try and make him gain 200 lbs over a two to four week period. Take the time to evaluate how much your steer will need to gain from the time of purchase until your show date to be sure you start feeding a finishing diet at the right time for your steer.

**Water and Minerals**

Always provide clean water and trace mineral salt with selenium. Feed your steer on a regular schedule and weigh his feed at least once a week so that you know how much he is eating.