

What is Livestock Judging?

- Livestock judging is the careful analysis of an animal's individual characteristics and the comparison of these traits to the accepted IDEAL or optimum for that particular class or specie. After analyzing each of the four animals individually, you then compare them to one another to ultimately reach a decision on a final ranking.
- Livestock judging is also a study of relating an animal's form to its intended function.
- In competitive livestock judging, each class consists of four animals. In most instances these animals will be identified by a number; however, in the case of cattle and sheep you sometimes need to identify them by the order in which they are standing. You number them from left to right.

Benefits of Competing on a Livestock Judging Team

- A strong majority of the prominent livestock breeders across the country have been involved in a judging program. If your goal is to breed great livestock, it is imperative that you develop great judgment.
- You will learn how to make accurate decisions and defend those decisions with logical reasoning. Presenting oral reasons will train you to think on your feet and will enhance your public speaking skills.
- Livestock judging builds character. It instills confidence in those prone to be timid and humbles those who tend to be conceited.
- Competing on a livestock judging team creates an opportunity to associate with future leaders of the livestock industry. Relationships established through your judging experience are irreplaceable and will last a lifetime.

Steps Required in Livestock Judging

Information: You must have a basic understanding of live animal and carcass anatomy, skeletal correctness, economic value of various body parts, breed character, sex character, plus many other pieces of information. In general, you must develop a mental image of the ideal for the species, breed, and sex involved.

Observation: Proficient judging requires extremely keen powers of observation. Furthermore, these observations must be complete and accurate in every respect. You as a livestock judge may possess a correct mental image of the ideal and yet fail to recognize a good animal when you see one.

Comparison: The next step entails comparing each animal in a class against all the others. A judge must be able to balance the good and bad features of each animal with those of the other animals and then select the one that compiles the highest quality package.

Decision: The final, and perhaps most difficult, step involves a decision on how the class needs to be placed. Many people have the necessary information and they may possess the ability to observe and compare, but they lack the skill and courage required to make the correct decision. A judge's decision must not only be accurate, but it should be made confidently within a reasonable length of time.

Hints of Livestock Judging

- Listen carefully to any instructions that are given concerning a class of animals. They may have an important bearing on how that class is placed. The same applies to any general instructions given prior to a judging contest.
- Don't waste time. Begin evaluating the class as soon as the first animals walk into the ring.
- Make every look count. Develop a system of observation and avoid repetition.
- Try to get an overall impression of the class as soon as possible. On cattle and sheep classes, it may be necessary to situate yourself at a 45' angle with the class; in this way, you can obtain a partial view of the rear, side, and front.
- If you cannot observe the class adequately where you are standing, move to a better position.
- See the animals exactly as they are, not as you would like to seem them. Don't "read" anything into the class. Don't play hunches. Don't try to out guess the official judges, and place the class exactly as you think it should be placed.
- Always remember, every class was set up with some kind of logic in mind.
- Analyze each class and try to determine the logic by breaking it into two pairs; an easy top, easy bottom and close middle pair; or a top pair, easy bottom and logical third; etc.
- Depend entirely upon your own judgment. Don't pay any attention to anything you hear someone else say about a class, with the exception of the officials or your instructor.
- Try to have the class tentatively placed before very much time elapses. Otherwise, you may get caught short of time on a difficult class.
- One of the worst things a judge can do is become rattled. If you get confused and nervous, back away from the class for moment, and relax. Place the class on fundamentals; don't become entangled in minor details.
- Your first impression of a class is usually correct if it is the result of careful analysis.

- Never talk or whisper to anyone while placing a class. Judging livestock requires complete concentration 100% of the time.
- For general observation, keep plenty of distance between yourself and the animals- a minimum of 25 feet if possible. If the rest of the students push in too close, ask your instructor or group leader to move everyone back.
- In handling cattle and sheep, devise a well-organized system so that you don't waste time. Concentrate on what you are doing. When you leave a particular animal, you should know exactly what you have just handled.
- Compile a good set of notes on each reasons class. Notes are necessary in a contest where you have several reasons classes (usually eight sets of oral reasons in collegiate contests).
- On reasons classes, make certain the placing you turn in on your card agrees with your notes.
- Always check your card before turning it in. Beware of turning in a blank card. Be sure the placing you have on your card is the one you want.
- If there is any time lapse in a contest, do not let it go to waste. A good suggestion is to go through notes from previous classes to determine the most effective way to describe each pair.
- Never argue with an official judge even though you may not agree with his placing. They are the official judges for a reason!! On the other hand, questions in a spirit of learning are certainly permissible and encouraged. Always be professional!!
- Nearly all students go into a slump one or more times during their judging careers. When this happens to you, don't become discouraged with yourself or bitter at your instructor. If you maintain the proper attitude, you will pull out of it.