

Basic Considerations for Junior Beef Cattle Projects

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If you're going to show a steer or beef heifer, you need to consider some basic points, in addition to the quality of the animal.

EXHIBITOR ELIGIBILITY: In general, exhibitors must be Texas residents at least 8 but not more than 19 years of age, enrolled in public or private school from the third grade to high school senior, and be bona fide members of a 4-H club or FFA chapter. At all major shows, and most county shows, exhibitors must enter as a 4-H or FFA group through their County Extension Agent or Agricultural Science Teacher. For most shows, entries may be made only in the name of an individual owner/exhibitor, partnerships are not allowed. Deadlines for entry vary, and may be as long as approximately three months before show.

ANIMAL CERTIFICATION: For all major shows, and many regional and county shows, all market steers must be certified through the Texas Steer Validation Program. Validation includes taking hair samples (source material for DNA analysis) and nose prints to establish individual identification. Steers are also identified with an electronic and visual identification ear tag. This is done by county validation committees, involving supervising County Agents or Ag Science Teachers, some time in June so as to meet the major show ownership deadlines of July 1. Nose prints and DNA from winners at major shows are subsequently checked for verification of identity. County shows may have other ownership dates and certification procedures.

Heifers generally must be registered in their particular breed registry in the sole name of the owner/exhibitor (before July 1 for the State Fair and November 1 for major winter shows). Depending on the show and breed, ownership is verified by: date the registry was issued, date of delivery, date of transfer, date of ownership, and/or date of sale, based on how these are listed on the original registration certificate. (Check carefully for each show's requirements, as they may not be the same.) Ear tattoos or brands usually are checked at the show for agreement with registration certificates. Check your heifer's tattoo or brand to make sure that it can be read by show officials.

AGE: Steers at major shows no longer have age requirements, so permanent teeth are not a factor. It appears steers can be competitive from as young as 12 months to perhaps 24 months of age, depending on inherent genetic size, maturing pattern, and nutritional management. Most steers are shown in the range of 15 to 21 months of age. Genetically larger steers generally should be nutritionally "pushed" for fast gain to show at younger ages or else they may be too heavy when adequately finished. Genetically smaller steers may need to be fed to gain slower and shown at older ages or else they may be too fat at desirable weights.

Heifers are shown by age according to the date of birth on registration papers. San Antonio and Houston have the same age classes for all breeds as follows:

- Late Spring calf April 1 and younger
(of previous year)
- Early Spring calfMarch 1 to 31
- Late Winter calfFebruary 1 to 28 (or 29)
- Early Winter calf.....January 1 to 31
- Calf Champion and Reserve Champion
(from preceding four classes)
- Late Fall Junior heifer..November 1 to December 31
- Early Fall Junior Heifer..September 1 to October 31
- Late Summer Junior Heifer...July 1 to August 31
- Early Summer Junior Heifer....May 1 to June 30
- Junior Heifer Champion and Reserve Champion
(from preceding four classes)
- Spring Senior Heifer.....March 1 to April 30
- Winter Senior HeiferJanuary 1 to February 28
(or 29)
- Fall Senior Heifer.....September 1 to
December 31
- Senior Heifer Champion and Reserve Champion
(from preceding three classes)
- Grand or Supreme Champion and Reserve Grand or
Supreme Champion

Fort Worth and the State Fair have similar classes that vary some between breeds. Regional and county shows often have wider age ranges within classes, depending on the number of animals exhibited.

BREED: Most major steer shows have purebred classes for British breeds (Angus, Hereford, Polled Hereford, Red Angus, and Shorthorn) and some other purebreds. Remaining steers may be shown either: (1) as purebreds, such as Brangus, or by breed crosses such as Charolais crosses, Santa Gertrudis crosses, etc., or (2) by “type” such as all Continental breeds and crosses, and all American (*Bos indicus* or Brahman-type) breeds and crosses. Smaller shows often do not have classes for breeds or breed crosses but divide by the three breed-types, British (usually purebred only), American, and Continental.

At all major shows, and many local shows, breed classification for steers is determined by classifiers selected by the show. Two things are important: (1) read the specifications in the specific show premium book for breed classes, as they are not the same for all shows; and (2) eligibility will be determined by the classifiers. Classifiers evaluate (with the specifications of the class at that show in mind) according to only the visible characteristics of the animal. The decision of classifiers is not subject to discussion or official protest. The breeder’s or seller’s word or even knowing actual genetic background may be a guide to breed classification, but these may just be sources of confusion and disappointment. Animal’s appearance is the only aspect that matters in classification. In major shows (except Fort Worth), and most smaller shows, steers classified out of the class where entered are moved, either to a Brahman-type division, usually called American Breeds and Crosses (ABC), or to a class called All Other Breeds and Crosses (AOB) or Other Breeds and Crosses (OBC).

Heifers are shown by their respective breed, or by breed-type (British, Continental, American) especially at smaller shows. Except for some small local or county shows, heifers must be properly registered in a recording association.

WEIGHT: Steers at major shows must meet minimum weights of 1000 pounds, (900 pounds at Fort Worth). There are no maximum weights. Steers are classed by weight within a breed or breed type division into groups of approximately equal number and not by pre-set weight ranges. Often there are three weight classes but this can vary. Some shows reweigh animals after judging, in which case steers must weigh within some range of their weigh-in weight, generally 5 percent. Some shows do not weigh before judging, in which case exhibitors provide a weight to show managers. In this case, some steers, usually at least the top two places, are weighed after judging and must be within a prescribed tolerance of the turned-in weight, usually 5 percent. Class weight ranges from recent major shows can be obtained at http://animalscience.tamu.edu/main/youth/weight_breaks.pdf. Regional and county shows may have widely varying weight requirements.

Heifers do not have weight classifications.

HEALTH AND RESIDUE REQUIREMENTS: Most major shows require, under regulations of the Texas Animal Health Commission, a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection, formerly called a “health certificate”. This document must be obtained from a licensed veterinarian before arriving at the show. Some shows do not require a certificate for steers. Requirements for the Certificate may vary over time, depending on prevailing animal health problems. Check carefully for each show’s requirements, as they may not be the same.

All major shows, and some county shows, have drug residue avoidance programs for steers. If so, exhibitors may be required to allow collection of urine, blood, or other samples for laboratory analysis. Shows may require some means of certifying, on entry forms or otherwise, compliance with residue programs. Check with your veterinarian, County Extension Agent, Agricultural Science Teacher, or some other knowledgeable person before using a drug or other material. Some products have long withdrawal periods, and there are others you might not think of as drugs which could leave a detectable residue that can result in disqualification. Also, drugs and other materials approved for use in humans may not be approved for cattle. Don’t take chances!

FITTING AND GROOMING RESTRICTIONS: All shows have restrictions on how steers and heifers may be prepared for show, and sometimes who can be involved in fitting or grooming. These restrictions may range from rigid inspection of so-called “slick-shearing” for steers to cursory examination for dressing materials. Some shows do not allow, at the show, hair clipping or the use of trim chutes, electric hair blowers or fans. Consult the particular show rules for clarification.

SHOWING: At all major shows, animals must be exhibited by the owner unless they are unable to do so. Exceptions vary depending on the show, but some examples are another school activity, sickness, or exhibiting another animal at the show at the same time. Documentation is usually required for these exceptions. Public school students at most shows are subject to “No Pass, No Play” rules, in which case neither the exhibitor nor the animal is eligible.

Unruly or wild animals can be excused from participation by show officials if they pose a danger to the exhibitor or others. Some steer shows are “terminal”, where animals that receive a premium placing, as determined by the judge, may be required to sell in the show’s premium auction.

GENERAL: All of these factors should be considered before obtaining a steer or heifer. The most recent rules for shows being considered should be consulted every year. All major shows have websites where rules are listed. Rules may change after animals are obtained, so read current rules carefully before entering and exhibiting. Even then, shows may be slow in updating and rewording rules to conform with actual operating procedures. However, thorough knowledge of rules may save confusion and bad feelings.