

CHARACTERISTICS OF 2013 HOUSTON TOP-PLACING STEERS

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Live and carcass data on the top two steers in each class for 2013 have been released by the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. Individual data can be seen at <http://hlsr.com/ExhibitorContestant/LivestockShow/News.aspx>. A summary of data from 1974 to 2013 is at <http://animalscience.tamu.edu/files/2012/04/trends-2013.pdf>.

The following summarizes the 2013 data by characteristic, with some comparisons to previous years.

LIVE WEIGHT – for the fifth year was turned in by the exhibitor, with placing animals reweighed for compliance within five percent. The average was 1254 lb, almost the same as last year. This is some 50 lb lighter than recent national average of finished steers. Weight has increased about 75 lb since minimum was raised to 1000 lb in 1987. However, it has varied only 18 lb over 2004 to 2013 so it may have about stabilized, although the industry continues to trend upward. There was little difference among British, American, and Continental classes. The individual range was from 1022 lb for the first-place lightweight AOB (which had six classes due to large numbers in the breed) to 1405 lb for the first-place heavyweight Simmental.

CARCASS WEIGHT – averaged 814 lb, ranging from 670 lb to 925 lb, less range than most years. No carcasses were disqualified from carcass premiums since the maximum acceptable weight was raised to 1000 lb two years ago in agreement with most current industry standards.

DRESSING PERCENT – averaged 64.9% (individuals ranged from 59.2% to 70.1%), which is 1-2% above the industry average of finished cattle. Dressing percent averaged 66-67% in the 1980s, when show steers were being shrunk more to produce the relatively shallow bodies that were generally preferred by judges at the time.

FAT COVER – averaged 0.42 inches. Range was 0.28 to 0.88, considerably lower than most years. No carcasses were disqualified for being under 0.25 inches. As has been true most years, British steers were fattest and Continentals thinnest. Average fat thickness over the last 10 years is 0.47. Lowest average fat of 0.35 to 0.40 occurred in the late 1970s to mid 1980s.

RIBEYE AREA – averaged 15.6 sq in (ranging from 11.1 to 19.9), largest ever recorded. British were smaller than Americans and Continentals. Over the last 10 years, the average has ranged from 14.8 to 15.6. Ribeye area has increased over the years as steers have increased in weight. In the late 1970s, ribeyes averaged from 12.5 to 12.9, but carcass weights averaged only about 700 lb. Many of the high-quality branded beef programs, such as Certified Angus Beef ®, have a maximum ribeye area of 16.0 sq in. There were 42 % of the 2012 carcasses which exceeded that size.

RIBEYE AREA / CWT CARCASS – is a better indication of muscularity than area alone without consideration of weight. The average this year was 1.92 sq in/cwt, similar to the last few years. Continentals were highest and British smallest. Since 1974, the range has been from 1.73 to 1.92. There was some thinking that slick-shearing would lead to more muscular animals being favored by judges. Slick-shearing started in 1993 and so has been in effect for 20 years. For the first half of that period the average REA/cwt went down. However, for the last half the average has been above the period before slick shearing. So, muscularity of the top two steers at Houston appears to have increased somewhat over the last several years.

USDA YIELD GRADE – is based primarily on fat thickness and ribeye area in relation to carcass weight to predict percent lean yield from the high-priced cuts. (Lower numerical Yield Grades equals higher percent lean.) This year's average was the lowest ever at 2.02 (ranging from 0.67 to 3.80). Only one carcass was disqualified from the carcass contest for exceeding Yield Grade 3.5. Continentals averaged lower numerical Yield Grades, followed by Americans and British. Considering the large range in muscling and fat among these top-placing steers, it is apparent that show judges consider factors, such as structure and general appearance, other than projected carcass leanness.

MARBLING – is the primary factor in USDA Quality Grade. The average this year was Small46. (For youthful carcasses, A Maturity, Small00 is the minimum for USDA Choice.) British averaged Small71, Continentals Small63, and Americans Slight92. These differences among types are consistent with industry. Marbling has averaged about one-half degree higher since 2000 than in the 1980s to early 90s.

PERCENT LOW CHOICE OR HIGHER – was 69% compared to 70% last year, exceeding industry average and almost 10 percentage points higher than ever at Houston. British were 80%, Continentals 79%, and Americans 44%. The average of the past 10 years is 57% compared to an average of only 25% over the 1980s to early 90s.

DARK CUTTER – is a condition generally caused by pre-slaughter stress. In the mid-80s to early 90s there were generally around 25% of carcasses that cut dark. In recent years this has declined significantly and was only 4% this year.

SUMMARY - Compared to current industry-wide averages these steers were outstanding as a group, being higher in USDA Quality Grade and superior in USDA Yield Grade.