

MICHIGAN BEEF PRODUCTION

Cooperative Extension Service  Michigan State University



Fitting and Showing Beef Cattle

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Let's assume you have brought a weaned calf into the barn and you plan to feed and fit him for the coming shows. The first step in making that calf a champion is getting him started on feed. If you have the same ration the calf received while on creep feed, it is a good idea to keep him on that diet and then gradually switch him over to the ration you plan to feed for the remainder of the year.

If the calf has not been creep fed or if you do not have access to the same ration, a quart of crimped oats twice a day is a good starting ration. Gradually increase the amount of oats while at the same time gradually adding the other ingredients of the ration. The calf should be on full feed after 12-14 days.

By gradually working the calf on feed, you reduce the risk of overeating and founder. The average calf will consume grain equal to about 2 to 2.5% of his body weight; in other words, a 500 lb. calf will eat about 10 to 12.5 lbs. of grain each day.

Tips on Feeding

We have two basic grain rations at Michigan State University that are used for all of our British cattle (Angus, Herefords, etc.) from weaning through show season. We simply vary the amount fed in accordance with how fast we want the animal to grow. These rations are as follows (parts by volume):

MSU Grower: 5 parts crimped oats; 1 part cracked corn; 1 part wheat bran; 1-2 lbs. 34% protein supplement per head daily. In addition, grass hay and a salt-mineral mix are offered free-choice at all times.

MSU Finisher: Same as above except crimped oats is lowered from 5 parts down to 3 parts, which increases the energy content of the ration.

The free choice salt-mineral mix fed to MSU cattle consists of equal parts of trace mineral salt, limestone, and dicalcium phosphate.

The 5 to 1 grower ration is fed to yearling show heifers after they have finished their first winter in the replacement heifer pen and to yearling show bulls after they have completed their 140-day gain test at a year of age. The amounts fed vary as follows: Yearling show heifers, 10 to 20 lbs. per head daily, depending on condition; and yearling show bulls, a full feed which normally amounts to 20 to 24 lbs. per head daily.

The 3 to 1 finisher ration is full-fed to bull calves during their 140-day test period from weaning to a year of age. It is also full-fed to British steer calves from weaning to show or slaughter time; larger-type exotic cross steers are fed a higher energy ration—approximately 3 parts corn to 1 part oats. Amounts consumed vary from 15 to 20 lbs. for bull calves and slightly less for steer calves.

During the winter months, one part by volume of corn silage is often added to the above ration. High quality corn silage is relished by cattle and it serves to whet their appetite. When corn silage is not available, soaked beet pulp may be used for the same purpose.

Show cattle at MSU are fed twice a day. Stale feed is always removed from the bunk prior to the next feeding. It should never be allowed to accumulate or the cattle may go off feed.

Exercise is important to any type of cattle but of utmost importance to show cattle. MSU show cattle

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have access to long, narrow grass lots which are designed to encourage exercise. As show time draws near, cattle are force-exercised to tone up their muscle and also freshen up their appearance—usually a mile a day.

Halter Breaking

After the calf is started on feed, halter breaking should be the next step. I feel the best way to halter break calves is to minimize the amount of motion and human strength needed to catch and securely tie the animal. I prefer to run the calf in a chute or tight corner pen, halter him and then turn him out into the pen where he is to be tied. I then pick up the loose halter rope and attempt to wrap the rope around a solid post or panel before the calf has a chance to realize what has happened. By tying the calf in this manner, he does not associate his pulling with any degree of freedom as he would if he were led to the place he is to be tied.

The calf should be caught and tied a couple of times before he is ever handled. After the calf is sufficiently quiet, he should be brushed or scratched so that he loses his fear of people. When the calf has quieted down, he should be led to feed or water. Again, association with pleasant experiences is a tremendous aid in training any type of livestock. At no time should the calf be treated roughly.

Washing

After the calf is broke to lead, it is a good practice to wash him so as to remove any scurf and dead or matted hair.

1. Before washing the calf, remove dirt, manure, etc. with a curry comb and brush.

2. Thoroughly wet the animal, then scrub with soap and brush (a high sudsing soap such as Orvus or Castile should be used).

3. *Rinse calf very thoroughly* as soap residue is the main cause of dandruff.

4. Until the animal is free of all dandruff and the hide is thoroughly clean, double soaping and washing is recommended.

5. Final rinse the animal with one capful of milk oil dip in a pail of water.

Curling and Brushing

1. After he has been rinsed or wet down with the milk oil dip solution, scrape the excess water off the animal with the back of a scotch comb or other suitable instrument.

2. Brush the hair down slick and curl the calf with a round curry comb using a marcel wave. This involves a great deal of back and forth wrist action and takes some practice to master it.

3. Wait for three minutes and brush hair upward lightly with a brush.

4. After you have gone over it lightly with a brush, pull the hair up with a scotch comb.

5. Brush and comb hair until dry. A cattle hair dryer hastens this process considerably.

Hair Care

The calf should be rinsed daily starting 4-6 weeks before the show. He should be curled and brushed each time so as to break the hair. Dampening the hair with a dip solution and curling before the animal is turned out at night will help greatly to train the hair and stimulate hair growth. If the animal is to be shown slick, only the legs and tailhead should be brought up, as illustrated in Figure 1.

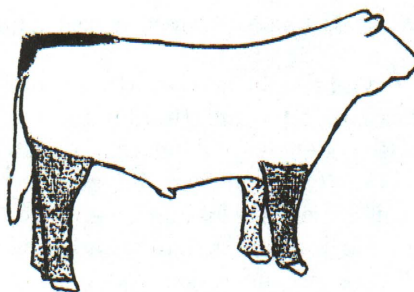


Figure 1

For cattle with short hair, train and pull up hair as shown here.

Training

The animal should be taught to stop and lead with his head up. I like to teach a calf the use of a showstick by stroking his underline while tied. Use a showstick with a blunt point on the end. I will stroke, then place a foot. When he moves the foot, stroke again. This way he cannot fight you or move to get away. After the calf places his feet well, he is ready to be led and have his feet placed while being held. When trying to move a foot back, push his head back slightly to the side of the foot you are attempting to move and vice versa for bringing a foot forward. A foot should be squarely under each corner of his body. Teach the calf to keep his top level and to lead and walk freely. Work often for several minutes each time rather than a few long drawn-out periods.

Foot Care

Care of the feet also comes under the category of fitting and is very important. Proper hoof trimming can change the position and set of the legs, thus changing the entire balance and lines of an animal. Hoof trimming should be done 4 to 6 weeks before the show. When at all possible, consult with experienced people as foot trimming is an art which few people thoroughly master. It should be done in a stocks or on a mechanical table.

A few points on general trimming:

1. Trim the inside toe and heel before the outside because the inside toe generally grows faster and longer than the outside toe. This is probably the most frequent reason for trimming. Trim the toe before the heel to ensure the animal will walk up on its toe.

2. Remove the outgrowth or rim of the sole around the edge of the toes and along the side of the foot with the nippers. Be careful to keep foot level while trimming.

3. Many times the toe cannot be trimmed as closely as we would like. When the bottom of the foot is springy to the touch, the next cut will probably draw blood—and you have gone too far.

4. Shape the foot and all rough edges with a rasp. An electric sander often generates too much heat and may seal the pores in the foot, thus inhibiting proper growth of the foot. However, a sander is satisfactory for steers because they go to slaughter at a young age.

5. The bottom of the foot, between the toes, should be hollowed out slightly to allow mud, etc. to ooze up through the toes. This works as a self-cleaning mechanism.

6. Make the side of the toes relatively straight on the inside by rasping between them.

7. Apply Kopertox or some other disinfectant to heal any cracks or cuts in the foot, especially between toes and along the hoof head.

Correcting Leg Problems by Foot Trimming

Bow Legged Behind

1. Trim inside heel down.
2. Trim rim off the inside claw out to the toe but leave the toe long.
3. Build up the outside heel.
4. Trim the outside toe short.

Toed-Out in Front

1. Trim both the inside toe and heel short.

Pigeon-Toed in Front

1. Same as trimming for the bow-legged condition (see above).

Cow-hocked Behind

1. Same as trimming for the toed-out condition (see above).

Frequency: To correct leg problems, trimming should be performed regularly every 30 days.

Clipping and Blocking the Hair Coat

Although more easily mastered than foot trimming, blocking is no less important. A professional job of trimming and blocking requires a great deal of time and patience. Clipping will not change the actual

size or conformation of an animal but it will greatly enhance its appearance. Great care needs to be exercised in this phase of the fitting routine.

In order to do a better job of clipping and blocking the haircoat, a simple metal pipe chute with a head-gate is used by most showmen today. It holds the animal in a stationary position and greatly reduces the time required to do a proper job of grooming.

For cattle on which heads are normally clipped (Angus, show steers, etc.), use an electric clipper and clip in front of a line that starts directly behind the ear. Leave the hair on the poll so as to give it more prominence and to give the head a longer appearance. Clip hair close to the skin, as shown by the shaded area in Figure 2. For Polled Herefords and Polled Shorthorns, clip the top of the poll. The heads of horned cattle are not clipped. Other breeds vary, and professional advice should be sought before you start. Do not trim the hair from the ears.

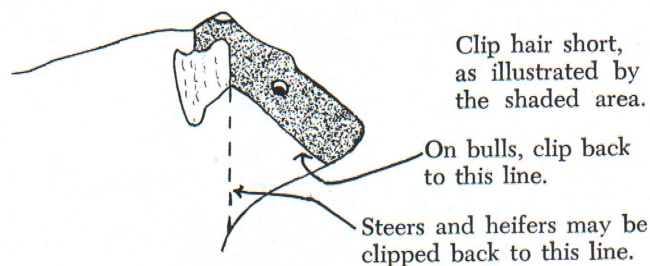


Figure 2

Next, clip the brisket and underline with an electric clipper. Be sure not to clip too high on the sides. Clip the tail starting at the top of the twist and go upward (figure 3).

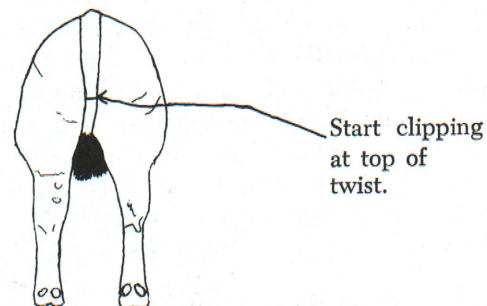
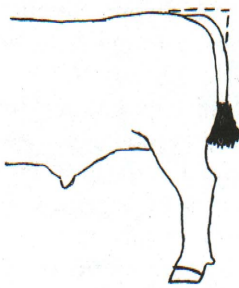


Figure 3

Figure 4 illustrates the stopping point where the imaginary vertical line crosses the tailhead. Blend in the tail head squarely with a pair of scissors or small clippers.



Clip so as to make side view of rump as square as possible.

Figure 4

If the animal is to be blocked all over (shown with hair up) care must be taken to insure the hair is in proper position (standing up) before clipping. The illusion of length can be achieved in the following manner. Clip out rear flank and behind elbow. Clip hair off the front of hind leg to straighten and also give length. Get hair up on tail head and square off (Figure 5).

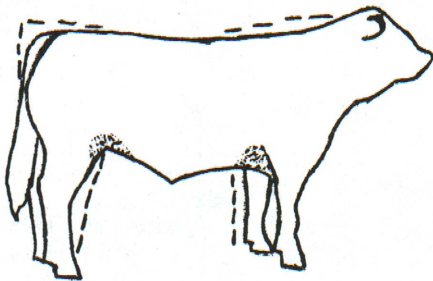


Figure 5

Clip forward on the neck also. The top line should be straight and level as viewed from the side. All of the clipping that is done where the hair is up should be done with a sheep shearing head or a small animal clipper.

Next trim the hind legs to give an appearance of proper set and to add dimension to the leg. Trim out the area between the hock and twist and also above the hock on the outside of the quarter so as to give it more bulge and expression of muscle. As viewed from behind, clip the top to give a round muscular appearance rather than a flat, square one.

The haircoat should appear neat and smooth. Blend the neck and shoulder in smoothly by clipping in a forward and upward manner.

Transporting Show Cattle

Show cattle should be transported in a manner that will provide a minimum amount of stress. Most trucks or trailers will suffice if properly used. Good footing is a necessity. Sand is the best with straw on top. If cattle are hauled a great distance, they should be tied so they can lie down. Don't overcrowd show cattle. Trips should be planned so cattle have at least a day, or better yet, two days to rest before the show. This

will allow them to regain their shrink and appear in a more natural condition.

Tie-Outs and Exercise

To keep cattle fresh and looking their best under the stress involved with transporting and showing them, they should be tied outside in the evenings. Tying at the tieouts provided by the show or merely tying to one's trailer is sufficient. Bedding should be provided. Tying out and proper exercise keeps cattle from getting stale at the show.

Show Day

When the big day finally arrives, get up early and be well rested. Rinse the animal and thoroughly dry him. Feed and water at the regular time; then let the animal rest.

About 45 minutes before you are scheduled to show, put your showhalter on the animal. Make sure the nose strap is adjusted correctly. Blow or brush all dust out of the calf. Boning is the first step in dressing the calf for show. Glycerin saddle soap (bars) is applied to the legs. The hair is then combed up on all sides of the legs up to the forearms in front and to the stifle (see Figure 6). Apply enough to make certain the hair will stay up. Clear laquer or spray paint can also be added after boning to help hold the leg hair. Apply saddle soap or butch wax to tail head and trim so as to level out the top line (see Figure 7). In winter, or when your animal's hair is up, butch wax may be applied to hard-to-hold areas of the body such as the lower middle and quarter.

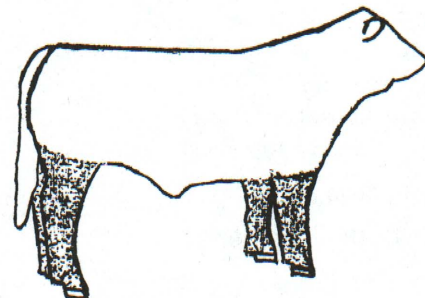
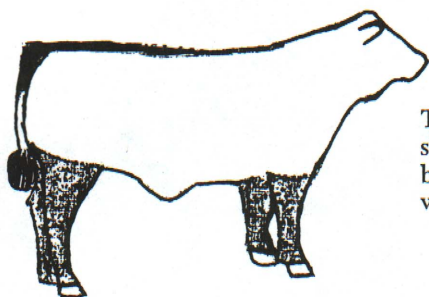


Figure 6

Rat the tail into a tight ball by starting at the top of the tail and rat everything high and to the center. Trim off excess long strands and spray with women's hair spray or laquer. Paint the feet of black cattle with black spray paint.

The last step in dressing is applying a light coat of show oil. I prefer to spray on the oil and then brush in with a soft bristled brush. Be careful not to get oil on the tail (where ratted) and the areas that have been boned up as the oil will cut the soap. An animal ready for the ring should have the dark areas boned, waxed or ratted, as shown in Figure 7.

Cattle should be fed or watered show day only to the extent they need to look their best. If an animal had a heavy middle, he probably won't need any feed or water until after the show. Or if he is tight-middled, he may need some to look natural.



The hair in these shaded areas should be blocked and worked up.

Figure 7

Showmanship in the Ring

Before entering the show ring, make sure you have your exhibitor number on, your showstick and a comb in your pocket.

When entering the ring, be alert and have your animal at its best. The judge wants to see him at best advantage as much as you would like to have him viewed that way. Lead your animal from the left side with your showstick in your left hand & the lead strap in your right. Hold the strap about 12" from the animal's head. Walk at the speed at which your animal looks his best.

Generally, cattle will be lined up side by side at the beginning of the class. Leave yourself plenty of room and try to get the front feet on higher ground if possible. A good showman always knows the high and low spots of the ring and uses them to his advantage. You should be surveying the ground far enough ahead of yourself so as not to be forced to set your animal up in a low spot. Get the animal set up as quickly as possible. Many times if you pull up on the animal's head just before you stop, he will stop with his front feet placed correctly. In many instances, one hind foot will also be placed correctly; this leaves you only one hind foot to place. Scratch the animal's underline with the show stick once or twice to settle him down and then place his feet. Make sure the top line is straight and head up. If time permits, check the hair coat to make sure it is still in proper condition.

Most of all, relax and let the judge view the animal. Do not over-show; you are showing the animal not yourself. A top showman is an unnoticed part of the animal he is presenting to the judge. When the judge signals you to move to another position, promptly pull out of line and quickly get to the spot in which you are instructed to relocate. Do this as rapidly as possible while still showing the animal to its best advantage. Set him up and stay alert. Be courteous to the showman next to you; help him position his animal and provide assistance at the walk if needed. Show your animal from the time he enters the ring until he walks out the gate. Most of all, win or lose, be courteous and considerate.

After the show, it is important to wash the oil, wax, saddle soap, paint, etc. out of the haircoat. If this is not done, it will impair hair growth and eventually result in a loss of hair.

Equipment Needed for Showing Beef Cattle

Foot Trimming Supplies

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|--|----------------------------|
| 1. Hoof nippers | 3. Rasp |
| 2. Mechanical trimming table or stocks | 4. Hand hoof chisel |
| | 5. Disinfectant (Kopertox) |

Washing Supplies

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Neck chain or nylon halter | 3. Soap (Orvus or Castile) |
| 2. Scrub brush | 4. Milk oil dip |

Hair Grooming Supplies

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| 1. Electric clipper | 8. Butch wax |
| 2. Rice root brush | 9. Women's hair spray |
| 3. Scotch comb | 10. Coat dressing oil |
| 4. Curry comb | 11. Spray paint (color depends upon breed) |
| 5. Dressing comb | 12. Electric hair blower |
| 6. Soft brush | |
| 7. Saddle soap | |

Showring Supplies

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Show halter (black or brown) | foot in length)† | 3. Dressing comb |
| 2. Show stick (about 4½ | | 4. Nose lead for bulls |

†Always use a showstick, as a cane is too short. A small blunt nail or bolt protruding about an inch from the end makes a wooden show stick more useful.

Other Supplies

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1. Neck rope for tying in stall (double tie) | 3. Water buckets |
| 2. Show feed pans | 4. Show box for holding equipment. |

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