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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRIME STEER.

The prime steer should present conclusive evidence to sight and touch that he possesses to a high degree the form, condition and quality demanded by the dealer in high class beef.

1. FORM. The butcher demands not so much that parallelogramic form so popularly spoken of by many authorities, as he does a high state of development in loin, crops, back, thighs, twist and rump. He demands development in these regions because they are the parts from which are secured the high priced cuts. The animal should show plenty of depth and breadth, furnishing a large surface for flesh, without that tendency to be paunchy, which would be objectionable to the butcher. He seeks, also, smooth, well rounded, general outlines which indicate both evenness of flesh and an absence of that tendency to be rough and coarse which would mean loss to him, since the waste in the dressing of the rough, coarse beast would be out of proportion with the weight of the marketable beef. Then, too, the butcher is not unmindful of the fact that having secured satisfactory development of these parts from which are taken the high priced cuts, there

is an added value in securing thick, even flesh throughout, on the cheaper as well as the more valuable parts of the carcass.

To the untrained eye, an unusual development of loins, crops and thighs would detract from the beauty, style and gracefulness of the beast. To the butcher, such development would increase rather than detract from its value. It should be clearly borne in mind, therefore, that no beauty of outline, style or gracefulness of carriage will ever take precedence of proper development in most important and valuable parts of the bullock. Nor should we assume that the highest development in these most valuable parts is incompatible with an ideal beef form. It is entirely consistent and desirable that we hold up as our ideal standard of the prime steer a combination of well developed parts from which are taken the high priced cuts, and that uniformly high development in all parts capable of taking on flesh which gives to the animal symmetry and smoothness of outline, that style and that beauty otherwise impossible.

2. QUALITY. (1) General Quality and (2) Quality of Flesh or Condition. (1) General Quality. General Quality in a fat steer is indicated by a medium sized, fine, clean cut, breedy featured head, bearing ears of moderate size and texture; short legs with clean fine bone; a fine nicely tapering tail; fine hair; a pliable skin of medium thickness, and smooth, well rounded outlines. (2) Quality of Flesh and Condition of Animal. The quality of beef depends largely upon the condition of the animal. By condition we refer to the degree of fatness of a bullock. However, it should not be assumed that the highest quality in beef is found in the fattest beast. There are two principal reasons for fattening a steer. (a) So to fill the animal inside and out with fat that when dressed there will not be a high percentage of offal or waste. In other words, a fat animal, other things being equal, will dress a higher percentage than a half fat or thin one. And further, in the fat animal the proportion of these parts which from their very nature are unsalable is reduced to the minimum. (b) That the flesh or lean meat shall be rendered more tender, juicy and of better flavor, by the disposition of fat throughout its substance.

Undoubtedly, the possibility of securing the highest quality in beef is influenced by the breeding and general quality of the animal.

Methods both of growing and fattening the beast influence the quality of its flesh. There is, too, a quality of flesh which is peculiar to the individual and which is independent both in breeding and methods of feeding. Desirable quality in flesh is indicated by a firm

yet mellow and springy consistency of the flesh at the crops, along the back, at the loins, and even on the sides, beneath the gentle pressure of the outstretched hand. Good quality of flesh is indicated in the fat steers by the absence of ties and rolls, or patches of gaudy, flabby fat.

A tendency to lay on fat in bunches and to roll at the loin indicates that during the fattening process the fat has been deposited in large masses and has not been evenly distributed throughout the animal, giving to the flesh that marbled character so necessary to the highest quality in beef.

Undoubtedly, outstanding coarseness and lack of general quality in the live animal are inseparably linked with undesirable texture in the beef cut from such a beast. Fullness at base of tongue, fullness or a roll of fat in front of point of shoulder, a full twist, a large mellow cod, a low, full, thick flank that stands out and rolls visibly as the animal walks, fullness and smoothness at rump and tailhead indicate that degree of fatness which is essential to the highest quality in beef.

When the ends of the fingers are gently pressed in the flesh on the side of the beast in an effort to find the ribs, there should be a firmness of flesh that does not admit of freely and easily forcing the fingers to the ribs and between them. A lack of firmness indicates the presence of too large a proportion of fat, which may be due either to a too fat or over-done condition of the animal or to an inherent lack of flesh, either of which is decidedly undesirable. A proper degree of firmness shows the presence of plenty of flesh or lean meat.

It is as difficult as it is unnecessary to decide whether form (used in its technical sense) condition or quality is of greatest importance to the butcher. The main point to bear in mind is, that an animal characteristically deficient in any one of the above requirements is disqualified to meet the full demands of the dealer in high class beef and consequently is not to be considered as a prime steer which would command the highest market price.

It might be well to add that a two year old steer possessing the desired form, condition and quality, weighing from 1,500 to 1,600 pounds is the one—other things being equal—that will command the highest market price. It is not scale or weight, nor within certain boundaries, age, but quality and condition that command the top prices in the market.

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