

# Educational Opportunity for Showing Market Animals by Breed<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Livestock exhibitions were very important in previous generations to identify elite seedstock and establish genetic trend for the meat-animal species (Darlow 1958). Livestock shows continue to be important but mostly for different reasons. Youth livestock projects instill knowledge and skills, leadership, and personal development (Astthroth and Haynes 2002). The youth livestock show serves as the educational summit of the project experience where 4-H and Future Farmers of America exhibitors showcase the product of their labor and experiential learning (Rusk and Machtmes 2003; Rusk et al. 2003; Boleman et al. 2005). The average American is over two generations removed from production agriculture (Dotson 2007; Lord et al. 2010). Youth livestock shows serve as the average American's window into animal agriculture and as a medium to educate the public on how American animal agriculture feeds the world.

## Exhibition of Market Animals by Breed and Weight

Many youth shows include both breeding and market classes for the four meat-animal species: cattle, swine, sheep, and goats. Intact males and replacement females in breeding classes are often shown by animal age within their respective breed to eliminate variation between breeds. Most youth shows exhibit castrates and/or market females

by weight only, but all national junior shows and many Midwestern county and state fairs show pedigreed market animals by both breed and weight.

An example for a market steer show by breed and weight is shown in Table 1. Fair officials can use amount of premium money, competitiveness of the exhibits, etc., to determine how many animals are needed for a breed to have its own class.

A show that has more than eight or ten market classes for a particular breed should consider having division championships to prevent having too many animals and exhibitors in the ring during the championship drive. The show described in Table 1 could have up to twelve breed or crossbred champion steers in the ring during the championship drive (Angus, Brangus, Chianina, Herford, Limousin, Maine-Anjou, Shorthorn, Simmental, Brahman-influenced AOB, English or Continental AOB, Brahman-influenced crossbred, and English or Continental crossbred).

An example with market swine is depicted in Table 2 and displays how animals within a breed could be broken into class. The gap in weights between 241 and 265 lbs dictated how the twelve Berkshire market hogs were broken into class (Table 2). If all pigs had weighed above 260 lbs, they all could have been shown within a single class. If there was a 15 lb gap between market hogs number four and five, the lightweight and heavyweight Berkshire market

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hog classes could have four and eight entries, respectively. Show officials should be careful when breaking classes to ensure competitiveness for all exhibitors and to hopefully minimize variation within classes due to age, maturity, and stage of growth, regardless of species.

Showing market animals by both breed and weight will improve the value of youth livestock shows by creating:

- **Enhanced educational opportunities for youth, families, and spectators**
- **More opportunities for youth exhibitors to win**
- **Economic opportunities for purebred producers**
- **Increased leadership engagement for youth**

## **Enhanced Educational Opportunities for Youth, Families, and Spectators**

Young people involved with livestock projects should understand that there is more genetic diversity in meat-animal agriculture than a white, blue, or belted pig; a black, red, hairy, or slick-haired calf; or a black, white, or speckled-faced sheep. These different phenotypes are generated by different breeds and breed combinations. Youth who exhibit in market shows by breed and weight will develop understanding of the genetic strengths and weaknesses of different breeds. An exhibitor will recognize that most of the steers within the 1100–1150 lb Angus class are smaller framed and probably more market-ready than steers of the same weight in the Continental breed classes, and comparable differences are found between breeds within the other species. Additionally, exhibiting market animals by breeds gives more youth awareness of how different breeds contribute to a crossbreeding program.

Livestock exhibitions that show market animals by breed and weight are more educational for spectators than those that show by weight alone. Showing by breed encourages conversation between spectators such as “what breed is that?” or “why is one animal larger but still the same color and of a similar weight?” This is especially true during the championship drive, when a large crowd has gathered, and breed champions representing numerous diverse breeds and crossbreds are showing concurrently. Showing by breed also gives the opportunity for an experienced judge to serve as a teacher to the spectators to discuss the genetic strengths and weaknesses of the given breed and its genetic contribution to commercial meat-animal agriculture.

## **More Opportunities for Youth Exhibitors to Win**

Winning certainly isn't everything, but ensuring that young people put forth their best effort to be in a position to succeed is critical to the future of youth livestock programs. Livestock exhibitions that show market animals by breed and weight result in more youth receiving awards than those that show by weight alone. Providing youth more opportunities to be recognized should be a priority for show organizers. Showing market animals by breed allows for a greater distribution of awards throughout the show and gives recognition to all breeds exhibited.

## **Economic Opportunities for Purebred Producers**

Livestock exhibitions that show market animals only by weight tend to primarily have crossbred market animals exhibited. One reason is because there are more commercial producers than purebred producers, thus it is easier for youth to acquire a crossbred animal to exhibit. A second reason is crossbred progeny from purebred parents are genetically superior to their parents, especially for lean growth, due to heterosis or hybrid vigor (Lush 1945; Olson 2008). Purebreds shown with crossbreds in shows divided by weight only are at a distinct genetic disadvantage. There is no incentive for producers who market show prospects to youth to raise purebred progeny. Exhibiting market animals by breed leads to increased marketing opportunities for small producers, particularly those of less popular breeds.

The increased opportunity for recognition and premiums created by shows that exhibit market animals by breed will encourage youth to show livestock in purebred classes. Local producers will begin marketing purebred livestock to area youth, potentially at a premium, due to the added exposure breeders receive when their animals place well at area shows. For instance, the value of a Dorset wether lamb prospect might be \$100 dollars if shown only by weight, but that same wether could be worth \$150 if it can compete for honors within its breed. Also, more opportunities for recognition at the show will result in youth raising or purchasing livestock from several breeds, rather than only one crossbred. This again creates monetary opportunities for local breeders and educational value for the youth exhibitor.

## Increased Leadership Engagement for Youth

Relatively few youth exhibitors who only show a crossbred market animal at a county fair will ever become involved in the activities of a state or national junior organization supported by a purebred breed association. Youth who exhibit purebred livestock are much more likely to become involved with these valuable leadership organizations. The national junior programs associated with many purebred breed associations allow juniors and their families to become acquainted with and compete against people with similar interests from all over the country. Along with exhibiting livestock, youth can compete in numerous competitive activities including: quiz bowl, livestock judging, poster, photography, writing, and public speaking contests (NJAA 2010). Young people who are involved with these leadership organizations develop an increased understanding of the meat-animal industries while developing life skills. Youth can also become involved in leadership roles by becoming a member of a state or national junior board of directors to help organize events and work closely with association staff (NJSA 2010; NJAA 2010; UJSSA 2010).

## Challenges

Fairs that plan to begin showing market animals by breed and weight should prepare for challenges. Showing market animals by breed will require fairs to have increased coordination of people because there will be an increase in the number of classes. Shows that fail to properly coordinate events and people will take a longer time until proficiency is developed.

Additional awards and premium money sponsorship must be identified due to the increased number of classes. These awards lend themselves to sponsorship opportunities from local purebred producers or state breed associations. Showing by breed will require modifications to the existing rule book. Show management will be required to have a thorough understanding of color patterns and breed character, pedigree, and registration and transfer rules for different breeds. This information is accessible from national breed registries.

Initially, few breeds will have enough exhibits to justify their own class. One option to improve this is to simply classify market animal into breed-type classes, rather than requiring pedigrees, with the intention of ultimately requiring pedigreed market animals. However, once instituted, a classification program is challenging to change into a pedigreed program.

## Conclusions

Junior livestock shows are more important now than ever due to average Americans being so far removed from their food supply. The focus of junior livestock shows should continue to be the educational value of the event if they are to remain relevant. The largest and most prestigious junior livestock shows in the U.S. show market animals by breed and weight. Junior shows that plan to begin showing market animals by breed will have challenges to overcome. However, showing market animals by breed will improve the educational value of the show, increase the number of youth award winners, allow more marketing opportunities for local purebred producers, and give youth the opportunity to become involved with leadership opportunities with junior breed associations.

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**Table 1. Example of schedule for showing market steers by breed and weight.**

	Number of entries	Number of classes
Angus	12	1 or 2
Brahman	4	0-Brahman-influenced AOB <sup>1</sup>
Brangus	11	1 or 2
Beefmaster	3	0-Brahman-influenced AOB
Chianina	22	2 or 3
Gelbvieh	4	0-English or Continental AOB
Herford	13	1 or 2
Limousin	15	1 or 2
Maine-Anjou	25	2 or 3
Red Angus	3	0-English or Continental AOB
Salers	4	0-English or Continental AOB
Santa Gertrudis	3	0-Brahman-influenced AOB
Shorthorn	15	1 or 2
Simmental	21	2 or 3
Brahman-influenced all other purebreds (AOB) <sup>2</sup>	10	1 or 2
English or Continental all other purebreds (AOB) <sup>2</sup>	11	1 or 2
Brahman-influenced crossbreds	45	4 or 5
English or Continental crossbreds	80	8

<sup>1</sup>AOB, all other purebreds.  
<sup>2</sup>The example in this table required five animals for a breed to have its own class, thus Brahman, Beefmaster, and Santa Gertrudis steers all showed in the Brahman-influenced AOB class; and the Gelbvieh, Red Angus, and Salers steers showed in the English or Continental AOB class.

**Table 2. Example of breaking breed class by weight.**

Number	Exhibitor	Breed	Live weight, lbs	
1	Abby	Berkshire	225	Class 1 Berkshire market hogs
2	Billy	Berkshire	229	
3	Charles	Berkshire	230	
4	Dan	Berkshire	237	
5	Erica	Berkshire	240	
6	Floyd	Berkshire	241	
7	Greg	Berkshire	265	Class 2 Berkshire market hogs
8	Haley	Berkshire	267	
9	Isaac	Berkshire	272	
10	Jake	Berkshire	275	
11	Kate	Berkshire	277	
12	Lauren	Berkshire	280	