



SHOW SOLUTIONS

3 things to look for in animal selection and easy ways to spot them

January 2022

By: Mari Morris, National Support Specialist

Animal selection is a tricky thing. Some people are born with the natural ability to evaluate livestock; others spend years studying and competing in livestock judging at the high school or collegiate level to become an expert. If you are reading this, you are likely in search of some help when it comes to animal evaluation. So, I have put together a few tips to help you navigate what can be a confusing yet critical step in raising a project. Put your judging glasses on, and let's get started!

1. Structure

Arguably the toughest trait to read in livestock, but also the most important. When judges, breeders or livestock enthusiasts say structure, they are referring to the feet and legs of an animal. But more than that, they are looking at how the skeleton fits together, the angles of certain body parts and how parts of the body correlate with others. We could give a lesson a day for a year on the topic of structure and still not cover everything; that is how intricate it can be. But here are some easy ways to read structure without complicating it:

- a. **Do their toes point forward?** We do not want an animal whose toes point in or out. They should be facing straight and forward.
- b. **Do they meet their stride?** When on the move, does their back foot set down where, or near where, their front foot picked up? This is a sign of flexibility and that their skeleton is put together correctly, allowing them to do so.
- c. **Does their topline stay level while in motion?** You want their spine to stay level, not roach up or weaken.

2. Skeletal width

This trait relates to power. We like skeletal width because the wider an animal is built down low, the more muscle and 'stuff' we can pack onto them up high. Think of it like a house; if a house has a narrow base or foundation, we will have to build vertically to get more square footage. But if a house has a large or wide foundation, we will get more square footage easier. You can read skeletal width in the following places on an animal:

- a. **Chest floor** — Evaluate between their front legs. Is their chest floor wide or narrow?
- b. **From behind** — Evaluate the distance between their pin bones, or from stifle to stifle. Also, is this width maintained to the ground? Meaning, do their back legs stand wide as well? Or do they narrow from the top of their hips/at their pin bones and down to the ground?
- c. **Their skull** — This one may sound silly, but the longer you study livestock, the more you will learn that the skull tells a story. It reveals maturity, age and stoutness. The stouter a skull, or wider, the wider an animal's build from there back is likely to be.

3. Balance

A balanced look is more highly sought after in the show ring now than ever before. When we use the term balance, we typically mean that the animal's body is proportional, and the pieces blend attractively. What is your first impression when you look at them from the side view? Is it, "wow, that one is pretty," or is it, "that one is cool but..."?

Continued on next page ----->

WWW.SHOWWRITE.COM

Part of the **Alltech** Feed Division





SHOW SOLUTIONS

It could be that their hip is too short. Their front end may be thicker and less elevated. They could be too long or short-bodied, making it hard for them to balance up. There are many more things that could go wrong when it comes to balance, but your first impression of the animal on a profile view is probably right. Listen to that.

A few last words: These are traits that we cannot feed into an animal. Meaning we cannot use feed or supplements to alter them. They are genetically engineered to be what they are in terms of structure, width and balance. Now, these are not the only traits that matter when making your selection. We did not even touch on muscle, rib, age, genetics or maturity pattern, which are equally as important. The goal in selection is not to find an animal who excels in one trait but who has a balanced combination. My last piece of advice is to get out and look at stock, lots of them! The more you see, the better you will get at judging them, and the surer you will be when you find "the one." Best of luck to you all in your upcoming selection journey and with your 2022 projects!

Be sure to check out our Stock Show Classroom at <https://go.alltech.com/showrite-stock-show-classroom> for more educational information on livestock selection and raising a project to show. Also, follow us on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube to stay up to date on the latest educational opportunities

WWW.SHOWRITE.COM

Part of the  Alltech Feed Division

