



BY RACHEL ENDECOTT, BEEF CATTLE SPECIALIST

COW SENSE CHRONICLE

DECEMBER 2014

STEER OF MERIT STATE BEEF CARCASS CONTEST

Greetings from Bozeman! It's finals week here on campus as I write this, and the semester is winding down. This is also the 24th issue of Cow Sense Chronicle—and they said it wouldn't last! Thanks to all of you for reading the newsletter each month.

I've had the opportunity to administer the state Steer of Merit contest since the 2008 fair season. This long-standing partnership between the Montana Stockgrowers Association and MSU Extension recognizes youth exhibitors for their outstanding steers. During my time with the program, we've implemented an Ultrasound Division along with the Carcass Division in an effort to include more cattle in the contest. Each year the Steer of Merit committee meets at the Montana Stockgrowers Convention to evaluate the past fair season and decide upon standards for the next fair season. I also have the privilege of presenting the awards for the top 5 steers in each division during the MSGA Convention. While I won't reveal those winners in this month's post, stay tuned to the January 2015 Cow Sense Chronicle for an update!

The standards for the 2014 Steer of Merit contest are detailed in Table 1. The committee strives to recognize superior carcasses with industry-reflective standards.

Table 1. 2014 Steer of Merit standards.

Carcass weight	650-950 pounds
Dressing percentage	55-68%
Ribeye area	≤ 17.5 square inches
Back fat	0.25-0.60 inches
Calculated yield grade	≤ 2.99
Quality grade	Choice minus or higher
Cutability	≥ 51.00%
Dark cutter	No

In order to qualify as a Steer of Merit, the carcass must meet every standard. Carcasses are ranked first by Steer of Merit status (yes or no), then by carcass price per hundred-weight (highest to lowest), then by cutability (highest to lowest). Carcass prices are set the third week of June using USDA-Ag Marketing Service data and are used throughout the fair season, which stretches from the third week of June through Labor Day.

Ultrasound division carcasses are evaluated with the same standards as the carcass division. All carcasses are assumed to have a 62% dressing percentage, 2% kidney, pelvic, and heart fat, and no dark cutters. This leads to somewhat less variability in the ultrasound data as a result, but I've found it hard to measure hot carcass weight and KPH fat of a steer that's not hanging on the rail.

I hope you've enjoyed reading about our statewide beef carcass contest. This year, 622 carcass division and 308 ultrasound division steers were submitted to the contest. Stay tuned for next month's newsletter to learn about the top 5 Steer of Merit awards!

Questions for Rachel?
rachel.endecott@montana.edu
406-994-3747