



BY RACHEL ENDECOTT, BEEF CATTLE SPECIALIST

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Welcome to winter! This month, I hope you enjoy the following press release about the 2015 Steer of Merit contest. Megan Van Emon, my counterpart in Miles City, administers the program.

MSU EXTENSION & MSGA ANNOUNCE 2015 STEER OF MERIT CERTIFICATIONS

Montana State University Extension and the Montana Stockgrowers Association (MSGA) distinguished 108 “Steers of Merit” out of 903 entries for 2015. Out of 589 steers entered in the Carcass Division, 70 were deemed Steers of Merit. In the Ultrasound Division, 38 out of 314 entries received the distinction.

The exhibitors and breeders of the top five steers in each category were honored at MSGA’s Annual Convention, Dec. 3-5 in Billings at the MetraPark Rimrock Auto Arena. The top five steer entries in the Carcass Division were: 1) Isabelle Lowry, Lewis and Clark County (Isabelle Lowry, breeder); 2) Haven Meged, Custer County (Bart Meged, breeder); 3) Sam Kearney, Ravalli County (Troy Griffin, breeder); 4) Cheyenne Hawbaker, Daniels County (Steve and Kristi Vorhees, breeder); and 5) Trenton Braaten, Broadwater County (Butch Gillespie, breeder).

The top five steer entries in the Ultrasound Division were: 1) Trey Nansel, Yellowstone County (Barry Kruger, breeder); 2) Parker Cook, Yellowstone County (breeder unknown); 3) Spencer Lepley, Yellowstone County (breeder unknown); 4) Kallie Candee, Richland County (Asbeck Brothers, breeder); and 5) Bill Bender, Yellowstone County (Northwest College, breeder).

The number of Steer of Merit certifications for 2015 decreased by 10 steers, with 27 fewer entries submitted compared to 2014.

The Montana Steer of Merit program was initiated in 1967 as a joint effort between the Montana Stockgrowers Association and Montana State University Extension. The program was designed to measure, record, and improve carcass characteristics in beef cattle. Data from these carcasses has

been summarized and analyzed statistically. Over time, significant increases have been made in quality grade and in yield grade, or cutability, indicating that cattle can be selected for leaner carcasses with higher cutability and still maintain high quality grade as reflected by marbling.

To be designated a Steer of Merit, carcasses are evaluated by a qualified individual using information that relates to yield of lean meat and eating quality. Beef carcasses must meet criteria set by the Steer of Merit Committee in the areas of hot carcass weight, dressing percent, fat thickness over 12th rib (back fat), total rib eye area, yield grade, percent cutability, and quality grade. Computer software programs help compile data and rank carcasses for state and county awards. Data is also analyzed periodically to track genetic and feed management progress. The minimum standards for Steer of Merit are reviewed each year and the program is updated to meet the changing industry standards.

For more information about the Steer of Merit program call Megan Van Emon, Montana State Extension Beef Cattle Specialist at (406) 874-8286.