

# JUDGMENT CALL

*Cattle judging, a combination of science, art and opinion, still has an important impact on the direction of our beef industry.*

*by Janet Mayer*

**D**o the names Bill Couch, Doug Parrett, Gary Minish, Jack Ward, Herman Purdy, Dave Hawkins, John Edwards and Dale Barber mean anything to you?

How about the names PS Power Play, Pine Drive Big Sky, Dan Patch, Brost Power Drive, Grubbs MacKenzie, R&J Angela and Honey Bears Sophie? Most likely you are nodding, no problem with this group. You recognize these are the names of champion Angus cattle whose progeny will be seen in breeding circles for many years to come.

What does this little quiz prove? Only that breeders can recognize the name of the show champions more readily than they can the names of the judges who choose them. And if you haven't already guessed, the men named above are among some of the foremost cattle judges in the livestock industry, past and present.

Obviously, being a cattle judge does not guarantee instant recognition or public acclaim. However, it does demand making important decisions in the show ring that can have long-range impact on the beef industry. Who are these individuals, who through their decisions, dictate the direction in which the beef industry will travel? Where do they come from, what are their qualifications, how are they chosen for shows, and how do they prepare to do their jobs?

The Angus Journal invites you to explore the world of livestock judging and meet a cross-section of prominent cattle judges, who discuss their profession and how their decisions affect the cattle industry.

## What Is a Cattle Judge?

A cattle judge can best be described as a person who uses a combination of science, art and sound judgment to evaluate individual animals.

A good judge must be quick and accurate with the ability to visually appraise and rank cattle competitively on merit or desirability of type. They then must determine the animals that most closely conform to the standards of the industry and be able to justify their decisions with good reasons delivered in a confident manner.

Among the most important characteristics of a good judge is a knowledge of livestock. To judge intelligently, the person must have a knowledge of correct body conformation, a mental picture of the ideal animal, and the reasoning power to base selections of individual cattle on the purpose for which they are to be used.

Equally important, the person must be

free of bias, have good character, be sincere and honest.

Most judges come from a farm background and have had the opportunity to show and judge livestock at some point in their lives. They usually work in some facet of the livestock industry, such as teaching animal science or a related course at a university, breeding livestock or working in the meat industry.

Harold Workman says judges are a vital part of livestock shows. Workman is vice president of expositions and operations for the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center and the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE), which is held in Louisville each November. "All of the judges who have judged here are good livestock people who are well respected by management and exhibitors."

Ranked as the largest purebred live-



Judges Dave Hawkins, Bill Couch and Vance Uden evaluate an Angus heifer at the NAILE in Louisville.

stock show in the world, NAILE has been in continuous operation for 18 years. During that period, Workman has developed NAILE from a one-week beef show with six breeds into a two-week exposition that includes sheep, horses, swine, dairy cattle and 15 breeds of beef cattle. He has worked directly with 45 breed associations, making the show a prestigious event that is viewed throughout the purebred industry as a show of significant importance to the breeds.

"For the purebred breeders, NAILE used to be just a nice place to show," says Workman. "But now they consider it the 'must place' to show their cattle. If they have the champion of the show, breeders feel they have accomplished something big, especially from the marketing standpoint. This show, as well as the other large livestock shows, are a great boost to selling purebred cattle; so, the people who are hired to judge have to be the top in their field."

The cattle judges for the purebred shows are hired by the individual breed associations, with NAILE paying the fee and the association paying the judges' expenses.

"We feel that the associations know who can best judge their breed; that's why we leave that decision to them," Workman says. "The judges for the junior heifer show, the market steer show and the feeder cattle show are hired by a special advisory committee at NAILE."

**Q:** *What does it take to be a good livestock judge?*

**A:** **Minish**

"Well, there are a lot of things. You have to know livestock selection, evaluation and showing. Judging is making a positive decision in a short period of time with the information at hand and being able to justify that decision. I guess I was fortunate enough to have been brought up in a family where my father and uncle ran a purebred operation. The experience I gained was certainly a big help, and it got my interest in judging going.

"I would say of equal importance was my outstanding livestock team coach at Iowa State University, Jim Keyser. He was really a horseman, but an all-around good livestock person. I learned a lot of the fundamentals and basics of the art and science of livestock judging from him. I later coached the livestock judging team and taught a meat evaluation class. This was a help because every day on my job, I was practicing the very same principles applied in livestock judging."

## INTRODUCING OUR PANEL OF JUDGES

### G A R Y M I N I S H



Minish was born in Laramie, Wyo., and grew up on his family's farm in Iowa. His uncle and father raised crops, bred purebred Hereford cattle and also operated a feedlot. His introduction to livestock judging came at an early age as he watched his father judge livestock shows and show cattle throughout the country.

Minish became a 4-H member at the age of nine and participated in 4-H heifer and market steer competitions. He later attended Iowa State University, where he graduated with a degree in animal science. From there, he went to Michigan State University, where he earned a master's degree and Ph.D. For the past 25 years, he has been on the faculty of Virginia Polytechnic Institute (Virginia Tech), where he is a professor of animal science and coaches the judging team. He has been judging national shows since 1968.

### J A C K W A R D



Ward was born in Brookston, Ind., and grew up on his family's farm near Oxford, Ind., where they raised grain crops and bred Angus cattle. Being the youngest boy in a family of seven children, who all took an interest in cattle and 4-H, he had plenty of role models.

He joined 4-H at the age of nine when he showed his first steer and began to develop an eye for judging. He was also a member of FFA and the state and National Junior Angus Associations. During his high school years, his father was the manager of Brost Angus in Oxford, Ind., which gave him additional exposure to the cattle industry.

After his graduation from high school, he earned an associate degree from Black Hawk College East and later got his bachelor's degree in agricultural economics from Purdue University. In 1984, he began his judging career. He judged 30 shows in 1991. He is managing partner of Three Rivers Angus in Roanoke, Ind., in association with Chuck Connor.

### D A V E H A W K I N S



Hawkins was born in Ohio and grew up on his family's livestock farm in southwest Ohio near the town of Springfield. He started in 4-H showing swine and later changed to steers and then heifers. He purchased his first Angus breeding heifer in 1953, and his family has been involved in breeding Angus cattle ever since. Seeing the judges evaluate his 4-H projects spurred his interest in judging.

He entered the Ohio State University in 1959 and was a member of the 1962 meats judging team, placing as second high individual in the International Livestock Judging Contest that year. After receiving his bachelor's degree in animal science, he stayed on at Ohio State to earn a masters degree. It was during that period that he started judging county fairs in Ohio; later he went on to larger shows.

He enrolled at Michigan State University and earned a doctorate in beef cattle nutrition and management. He joined the faculty at Michigan State in 1969, where he is a professor of animal science. He also is in charge of the campus beef cattle teaching operation and the breeding program for the university's Angus and Polled Hereford cattle.

**A: Ward**

"I think, without question, the most important thing is integrity. My family and I have shown cattle all of our lives, and we really enjoy showing under judges with strong integrity.

"Second, I like judges to select the kind of cattle they would breed. For instance, I have in mind the kind of cattle our farm should be breeding. When I go to judge a show, I try to select the cattle that are similar to that image. You have to have a good eye, which I believe is something you develop from experience and education."

**A: Hawkins**

"I think there are a number of criteria. Basically, one has to have a sense of what is desirable within a particular breed. Probably most important is to be able to evaluate structural soundness and to be aware of body composition. If you have had some work in meat evaluation, it makes you much more astute in looking at an animal and estimating how much is fat, how much is muscle. I think many of the people who have evolved into leading livestock judges have done quite a lot of meat evaluation work and have also taught this to other people.

"A person who judges must be a good communicator who enjoys working with both adult breeders and juniors. You should have a great deal of integrity in making impartial decisions that are based objectively on what you see, and then, be able to communicate your reasoning to the audience."

**Q: What are the pros & cons of being a livestock judge?**

**A: Minish**

"It will make you old in a hurry, and it won't necessarily make you a lot of friends. But I think a couple of things that have been positive for me are the opportunity to travel throughout the United States and outside the country and to see beef cattle production in different areas. If I hadn't been judging shows, I probably wouldn't have met as many breeders and visited their operations.

"By judging, I think it helps me learn organizational and communication skills. From a decision-making standpoint, I think it enables me to make better decisions in my work as well as in my personal life."



**A: Ward**

"It's very rewarding to select cattle and then watch them perform in the purebred world. These cattle are at the youngest time of their lives. It's fun to follow them throughout their breeding career.

"I also enjoy the competitive atmosphere. One of the drawbacks is that you can't make everyone happy. I wish that I could. When I am judging, I make it a point to say something positive about every animal in the ring. They all have faults. There is no such thing as the perfect animal, but I believe that every animal has some merit."

**A: Hawkins**

"Judging livestock gives me great personal satisfaction. I enjoy looking at the cattle. To begin with, when I am invited to judge a show, I take it as a compliment that they have chosen me to evaluate their animals.

"I would really like to judge more shows than I do, but because of the time constraints of my job at the university, I limit myself to judging shows only on state or national levels. I think judging is a great opportunity to interact with livestock breeders, and I think of myself as kind of a role model to the people who have asked me to evaluate their livestock.

"The major drawback is that when you judge a show you subject yourself to criticism."

**Q: How has cattle evaluation changed to meet the demands of a performance-minded industry?**

**A: Minish**

"I think as we evaluate the industry at any point in time, we are always saying that it's not quite right for the time, commercially.

Basically, though, if you look back at cattle that have won shows, these were livestock that met the standards of the times. Right now, we need to be making some changes that will bring livestock into a commercial perspective, and I feel that it is basically being done. I think the steer shows do a pretty good job of that, but it is easier to change market animals in a hurry than it is to change a whole breeding program.

"Sometimes our ideas and changes in standards get ahead of how fast we can change a breed of livestock, but it's not as far apart as people make it out to be."

**A: Ward**

"Just in my lifetime we have gone through a time in the cattle business where we had two different segments: the performance people and the show people. Lo and behold, fortunately as years pass, these two segments are getting closer. We are all shooting for the same goal now, which I think is very important. The show ring is nothing more than a picture window of what a breed has to offer the entire cattle business."

**A: Hawkins**

Over the past 40 years, the time I have been involved, we have tried to use every tool possible to evaluate cattle. But you have to remember: in the show ring, one is limited by the number of things one can

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**— Gary Minish**

conveniently evaluate in a reasonable period of time.

"Historically, for the first 300 years most cattle evaluation was done strictly by visual appraisal, because that was the only measurement available. Beef cattle performance testing programs began in the 1950s in Virginia and gradually expanded into the other states. In more recent years, with computers giving us the capability to analyze records and with national sire evaluations and EPDs, we now are considering these things in judging cattle in the show ring. We have also been able to incorporate ultrasound to measure backfat, loin eye dimension and overall muscling, and this is being used in judging contests and judging evaluation of livestock.

"As different tools have evolved and developed, we have tried to adapt them to judging livestock. But they must be innovations that can be done quickly and easily enough to be of use."

**Q: *What is your opinion of performance shows?***

**A: Minish**

"I'm the kind of person who thinks we should always be trying something new. I think it's a good move. We need to take a hard look at performance shows and see how they work. I believe there is a way to combine performance data and the right kind of information of livestock evaluation.

"But you have to be awfully careful not to put too many variables in there or you'll find you can't come up with decisions. I don't think we necessarily want a computer making final decisions. I think people judging livestock shows should be given pertinent data. In my opinion, such data help in making wise and correct decisions."

**A: Ward**

"Every breed knows what direction they should be taking at this point to close the gap between purebred and commercial cattle. What I have found is that we do not need to incorporate EPDs in the show ring, because the breeders have already taken care of that themselves. They understand what kind of cattle they have to breed for the right amount of milk and the biggest growth.

"I think sometimes we lose sight of what the show ring is about. It is to show breeders where the breed is today. Use it for that purpose and leave the other decisions to the breeders."

**A: Hawkins**

"As I said earlier, I think we need to use every possible tool that we have available to us in making breeding decisions. But it may not be possible to do all of that in a livestock show. I think one needs to be aware of what one can do in the time allotted to a show. Certainly the shortest evaluation occurs when one person evaluates all of the livestock without an associate judge, without performance data, strictly by visual appraisal. That is probably the cheapest show and takes the least amount of time of any of the different systems we have.

"As you add to the performance data that you are expected to evaluate as a judge, it takes more time to sort out the data and come up with a decision while the show is in progress. Instead of a class lasting 15-20 minutes, it suddenly lasts 45 minutes to one hour, and it gets very tiring for the exhibitors, the spectators and the person judging. If performance is going to be included in the shows, I think one must be selective of the data and be careful not to use the show ring for more than it was intended.

"One of my pet peeves is to provide a lot of data for the audience and exhibitors and not give them to the judge. It is difficult when everyone else has the information and you are judging by visual appraisal alone."

**Q: *Do you think your judging decisions have any impact on the beef industry?***

**A: Minish**

"If you look at the history of the beef cattle business, livestock shows have had a big impact on the type of cattle that are

produced. Regardless whether we say the top animals are right or wrong, if you follow the bulls that have been shown, you will see that the AI organizations are using these bulls. There is no question in my mind, good or bad, our decisions have an impact by these champions working their way into the breeding program."

**A: Ward**

"Actually it would be very nice to think that's true. As I said before, a show is a picture window of a breed with the purpose of giving breeders an idea where the breed is going. When I watch a show, I listen to the opinions of the judge, and I think we can all learn from this.

"I probably have more impact when I judge the junior shows. No matter if these young people win or lose with an animal, they are learning valuable skills such as leadership and dedication with their projects. I thoroughly enjoy working with the juniors, and I always stress to them that the experience of working with animals and showing them is a good building tool in their lives."

**A: Hawkins**

"I think all of us who judge livestock hope what we have done has helped set some direction for the beef industry. If we are trying to stick to the very basics, structural soundness has not changed over the past 40 years that I have been judging. The cattle that were structurally sound in the 1950s would still be structurally sound today; however, we've selected different sizes and types of cattle over those years. Those things have changed, and one needs to be current with what's going on in the industry.

"Historically, looking back at the cattle that have gained prominence in the show ring over the past 40 years, and I am not talking about an animal that won one show, but about an animal that over a show season was consistently at the top of class, division or a champion. These cattle were used in the breeding herds and their sons and daughters were used in breeding, and you can see they did have along-range impact on the breeding program.

"So, as judges, perhaps each one of us contributes a little bit to that impact. I hope that we have been able to make some changes and have been able to influence what happens in the beef cattle industry."

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