



Know what you're looking at!



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263574 April 08

A guide to stock judging

2nd Edition



Better Returns Programme



For decades, Young Farmers and others have competed in stock judging.

Some consider placing four animals or carcasses in order as an art form. However, good stock judging results from sound observation and an understanding of an animal's make-up. It also depends on being able to explain your choices simply and clearly.

These guidelines are produced with funding from EBLEX and the Beef and Sheep Better Returns Programmes, together with BPEX and the National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs. They set out what to look for and explain why it matters.

Good stock judging skills are increasingly important in livestock farming. There is constant pressure to match animals to market demands – that is the basis for the Better Returns Programmes. A good eye, sound observation and rational choice will all help ensure better returns.



Clive Brown
Regional Manager,
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Edited by Geoff Dodgson, Chamberlain.

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Preparing to judge

Ensure you have a white coat. Wear it at all times and keep it buttoned up. Be smart, look the part.

Before you start

Establish what has to be judged? Are you judging animals for breeding or for the butcher?

Establish how long you have to judge the class.

Read the judging card to establish the criteria against which you will be judged.

Stand back

Have a good look from a distance at the group. Understand what you have to judge, its general appearance, type, etc. First impressions are often the best. Make a judgement by eye and confirm by careful handling. When judging livestock for slaughter refer to carcass quality and killing-out percentages. *Don't rush in.*

Giving reasons

Establish how long you have, usually two minutes are allowed. Memorise your reasons, as much as possible.

Picturing the animals will help.

Stand up straight and look the judge in the eye.

Speak clearly and slowly enough for the judge to follow.

Describe the stock fully, refer to any distinguishing features (eg white face). As you deliver your reasons compare as much as possible, going from front to back or back to front using the same style for all animals in the class with emphasis on the important areas. This means that you are less likely to get confused and allows the judge to follow your reasons more easily.

Use the full time allocated, the clearer your reasons, the better your chances.

Thank the judge when you have finished – whether you enjoyed the experience or not. Judges rarely remember if you thank them, they always remember if you don't!

Example of a presentation

Starting

"Mr / Madam Judge.

These are my reasons for placing this class of ... in the following order."

(always check your order matches your card)

List your reasons....

... and finishing

"Those Mr / Madam Judge are the reasons why I have placed this class in the order a, b, x, and y."



Dairy cows

Before you start

Stand back and have a good look from a distance at the group. Get a general impression of the animals to judge, appearance, type, distinguishing features, etc.

Be methodical: start at the head and work your way to the rear inspecting all the important dairy characteristics.



Head

- ✓ Long, feminine head
- ✓ Bright eyes
- ✓ Broad muzzle

Topline

- ✓ Level
- ✗ Weak over loin
- ✗ High tail head

Body capacity

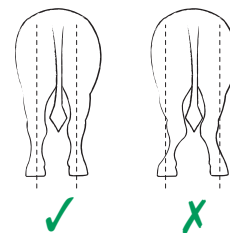
- ✓ Plenty of length and depth for forage conversion
- ✓ Plenty of width and well-sprung ribs

Hindquarter

- ✓ Plenty of length from hook bone to pin bone
- ✓ Plenty of width between pin bones

Neck

- ✓ Blends to finely set, angular-shaped shoulder
- ✗ U-shaped



Udder

- ✓ Fore attachment must be strong and carried well forward blending into a deep capacious body
- ✓ Pink, fine-textured skin
- ✓ Plenty of width to rear with strong attachment
- ✓ Prominent milk vein
- ✓ Even length teats in the centre of even quarters
- ✗ Pendulous and fleshy

Legs and feet

- ✓ Parades well on four well-shaped legs
- ✓ Up on pasterns
- ✓ Plenty of heel depth
- ✗ Closed-hocked or sickle hocked
- ✗ Overgrown clees will make them overstretch
- ✗ Lameness on parade
- ✗ Down at heel



Finished beef



Better Returns Programme

Before you start

Stand back and have a good look from a distance at the group. Get a general impression of the animals to judge, appearance, type, distinguishing features, etc.

Be methodical: start at one end and work your way to the other end inspecting and handling as you go. Remember, you should always handle the loin on the left hand side, as the kidney hangs loose on this side.

What to look for

Always look for length, width and depth of fleshing throughout.

Above and below the dotted line:

As much as possible above the line

– good quality, expensive cuts

As little as possible below the line

– lower quality, cheaper cuts

The shoulder

- ✓ Broad and deep
- ✓ Well-developed
- ✓ Well-fleshed
- ✗ Lacking flesh
- ✗ Narrow

Brisket

- ✓ Light
- ✗ Broad, full or wasteful

Chine

- ✓ Full fleshed
- ✗ Weak, lacking flesh

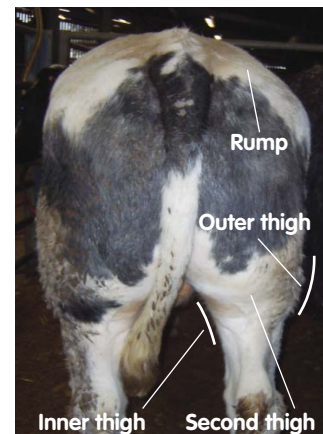
Loin

- ✓ Long and deep
- ✓ Full
- ✗ Lacking flesh
- ✗ Narrow

The back

(Topline)

- ✓ Long
- ✓ Wide
- ✗ Short
- ✗ Narrow



Hindquarters

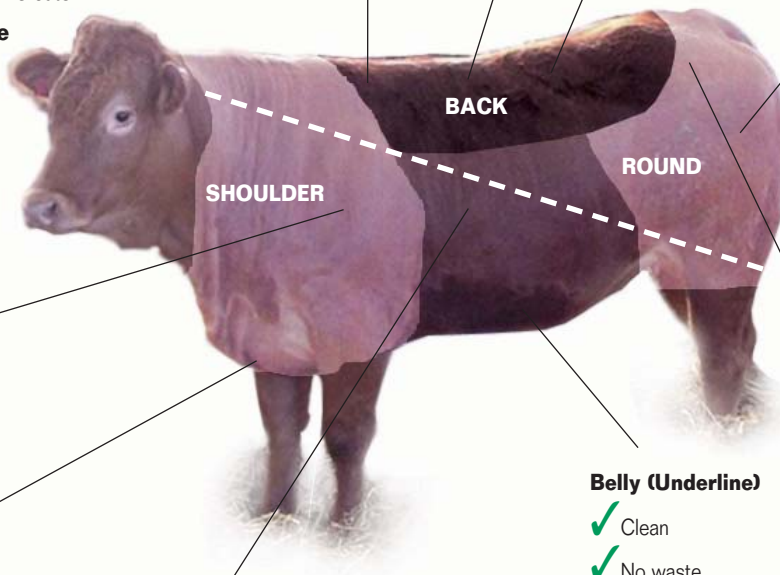
The round

Hindquarters

- ✓ Well fleshed in first and second thighs
- ✓ Muscle development carried well down to the hocks
- ✗ Flat and shallow
- ✗ Narrow, lacking width
- ✗ Lacking muscle development

Rump

- ✓ Well-rounded
- ✓ Broad
- ✗ Shallow and concave
- ✗ Pin bones prominent



Belly (Underline)

- ✓ Clean
- ✓ No waste
- ✓ Parallel with top line

Ribs

- ✓ Well sprung and trim
- ✗ Soft and fat

Finish

Should carry an even degree of finish. ie the fatter the animal the softer to the touch it becomes.



Better Returns Programme

Beef carcass

Stand back and have a good look from a distance at the group. Get a general impression of the carcasses to judge, appearance, type, etc. Identify if heifer, steer or bull carcasses.

Be methodical: start at:

- **the round** (second thigh, top piece and rump)
- **then back** (loin and fore rib)
- **then shoulder**

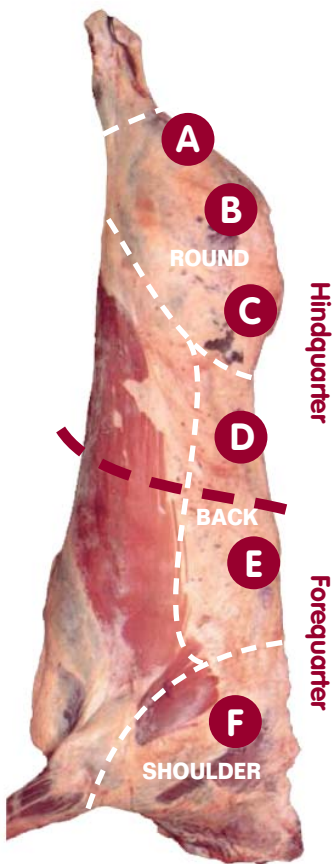
What to look for

- A** Second thigh
- B** Top piece
- C** Rump
- D** Loin
- E** Fore rib
- F** Shoulder

Proportion of hindquarters to forequarters – well-fleshed hindquarter to light forequarter is preferable.

Colour, quality and texture of fat

- ✓ White/creamy
- ✓ Firm
- ✗ Yellow
- ✗ Oily



Amount of fat over brisket –

Even distribution with no excessive depth requiring trimming.

Conformation

The round

Shape of round

- ✓ Well-rounded, convex in profile, fullness of flesh through the second thigh, top piece and rump.
- ✗ Narrow, concave in profile.

The back

Thickness of back – In proportion to the size of the carcass, should be broad, and thick.

Depth and area of eye muscle – Deep and broad loin with fleshing carried well around the ribs.

The shoulder

Thickness of shoulder area – Look for neat, compact, shape that blends well with forequarter.

Shape of forequarter – Compact and well-fleshed while still being well balanced in proportion to the hindquarters.

Fat

Distribution of fat throughout carcass – There should be a light cover of fat, evenly distributed with no patchiness or heavy fat deposits internally or externally that require trimming.

Amount of fat over eye muscle –

Even distribution, thin layer (4–8mm) covering the external surface with light deposits intra-muscularly.



Market requirements

Fat class → increasing fatness

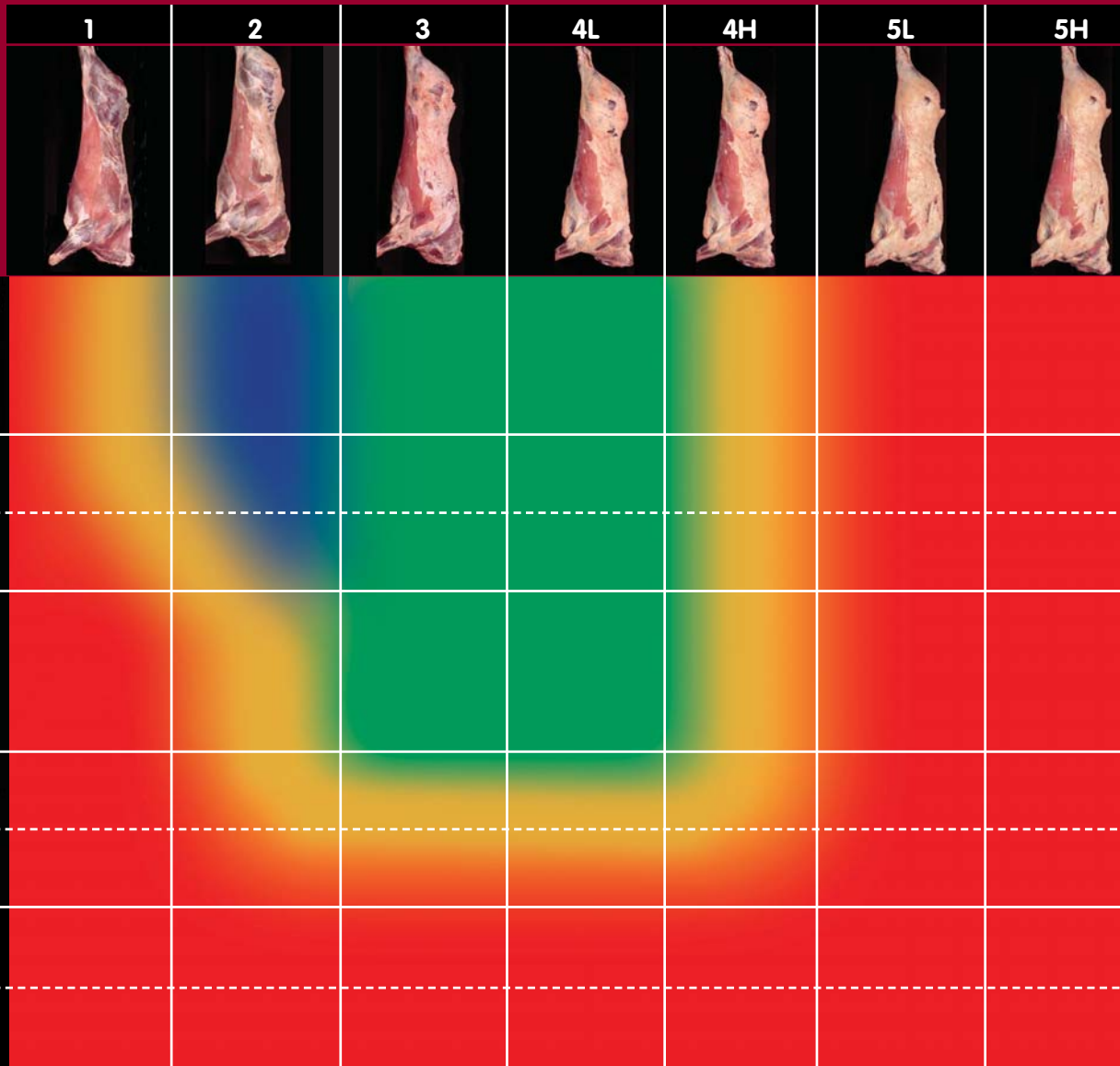
Fat is determined by visual assessment of external fat cover. There are five main classes. Class 4 and 5 are subdivided into L (leaner) and H (fatter).

Carcass assessment addresses conformation and fat.

Fat cover is scored on a 1-5 scale.

Conformation is assessed from E to P.

Combining scores for conformation and fat determines the markets which beef suits best.



Market signals



- Little or no demand
- Discount prices
- Poorest returns



- Medium demand
- Average prices
- Moderate returns



- High UK demand
- Premium prices
- Best returns



- High demand for specific export markets
- Premium prices



Breeding ewes



Before you start

Stand back and have a good look from a distance at the group. Get a general impression of the ewes to judge, appearance, type, etc. Pay close attention to distinguishing marks, colour of wool, face, etc.

Remember: wool can mask a great deal about the animal, so handle animals at the key points.

The ewe needs to be healthy with length, width and depth of body; she needs to eat, walk and feed two lambs. So the order of checking is:

- 1) **Teeth** – eating is essential
- 2) **Feet** – need to be able to walk to find food
- 3) **Udder** – to rear two lambs.

Mouth

- ✓ Clean mouth with no signs of wear and no gaps:
 - 2 broad teeth = 1 yr old
 - 4 broad teeth = 2 yrs old
 - 6 broad teeth = 3 yrs old
 - 8 broad teeth = 4 yrs old, or older

Up to 12 months old, sheep will have a full set of milk teeth. In older sheep, the teeth will start to wear down, have gaps and fall out.

- ✗ Broken mouth with signs of wear/gaps/teeth fallen out indicates old ewe

The head

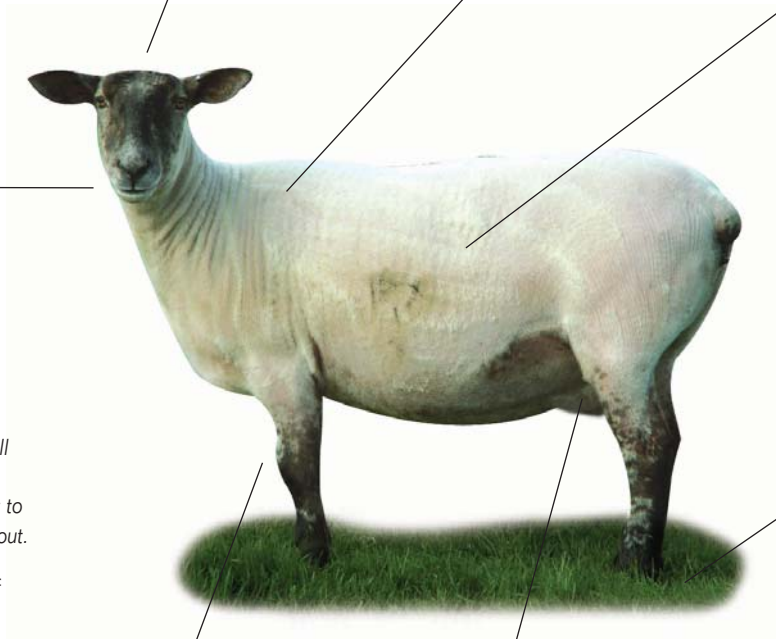
- ✓ Bright, bold eyes
- ✗ Short, broad head

Shoulders

- ✓ Wide, well-covered shoulders
- ✗ Narrow, lacking flesh

The body

- ✓ Good length, width and depth
- ✗ Short
- ✗ Narrow and lacking depth



Wool

- ✓ Even growth of staple in fleece
- ✗ Open fleece

Legs

- ✓ Strong boned, placed on each corner of ewe
- ✗ Bad legs

Udder

- ✓ Sound supple udder and two well-placed teats
- ✗ Swollen quarters, hard lumps or sores
- ✗ Excessively large teats

Feet

- ✓ Deep heel with short clees
- ✓ Well up on pasterns
- ✗ Lamé feet
- ✗ Down on pasterns



Finished lamb



Before you start

Stand back and have a good look from a distance at the group. Get a general impression of the lambs to judge, appearance, type, etc.

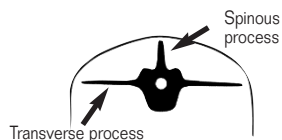
Pay close attention to distinguishing marks, colour of wool, face, etc.

Remember: wool can mask a great deal about the animal, so handle animals at the key points.



The loin

- ✓ Spinous and transverse processes felt as corrugations with light pressure.
- ✓ Good width and fullness of eye muscle.



Skeletal structure of loin



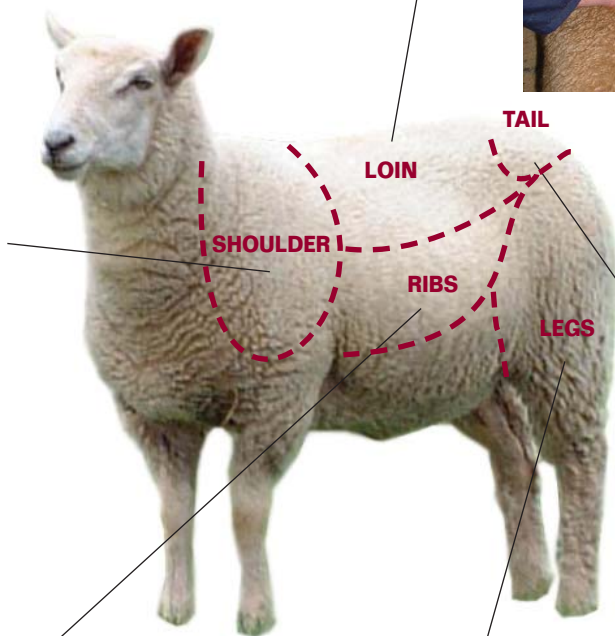
The shoulder

- ✓ Neat and compact
- ✓ Eye muscle development extended well forward
- ✗ Narrow and lacking flesh



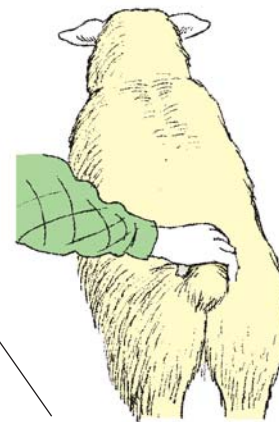
The ribs

- ✓ Light covering, individual ribs easily detected
- ✗ Not too lean (bare)
- ✗ Not too fat (individual ribs undetectable)



The legs

- ✓ Broad and well filled to the shank



The tail (dock)

- ✓ Individual bones easy to detect with light pressure
- ✗ Not too lean (narrow and bones bare)
- ✗ Not too fat (broad, soft and individual bones undetectable)



Lamb carcase

Stand back and have a good look from a distance at the group. Get a general impression of the carcases to judge, appearance, type, etc.

Be methodical: start at:

- the hind leg
- then chump
- then back
- then shoulder

What to look for

- A Leg
- B Chump
- C Loin
- D Shoulder



Lean meat should not be too dark with a fine grained texture.



Conformation

The legs

- ✓ Short boned
- ✓ Broad and well filled to the shank
- ✗ V-shaped

The chump

- ✓ Well-developed
- ✓ Full and broad

The loin

- ✓ Good width and fullness of eye muscle

The shoulder

- ✓ Well extended eye muscle
- ✓ Neat and compact

Fat

Depth of fat over legs and loin should be in correct proportion.
Fat on breasts to be in correct proportion.
Ribs – light with high lean to fat ratio.
Dock – broad dock indicates excess fat.

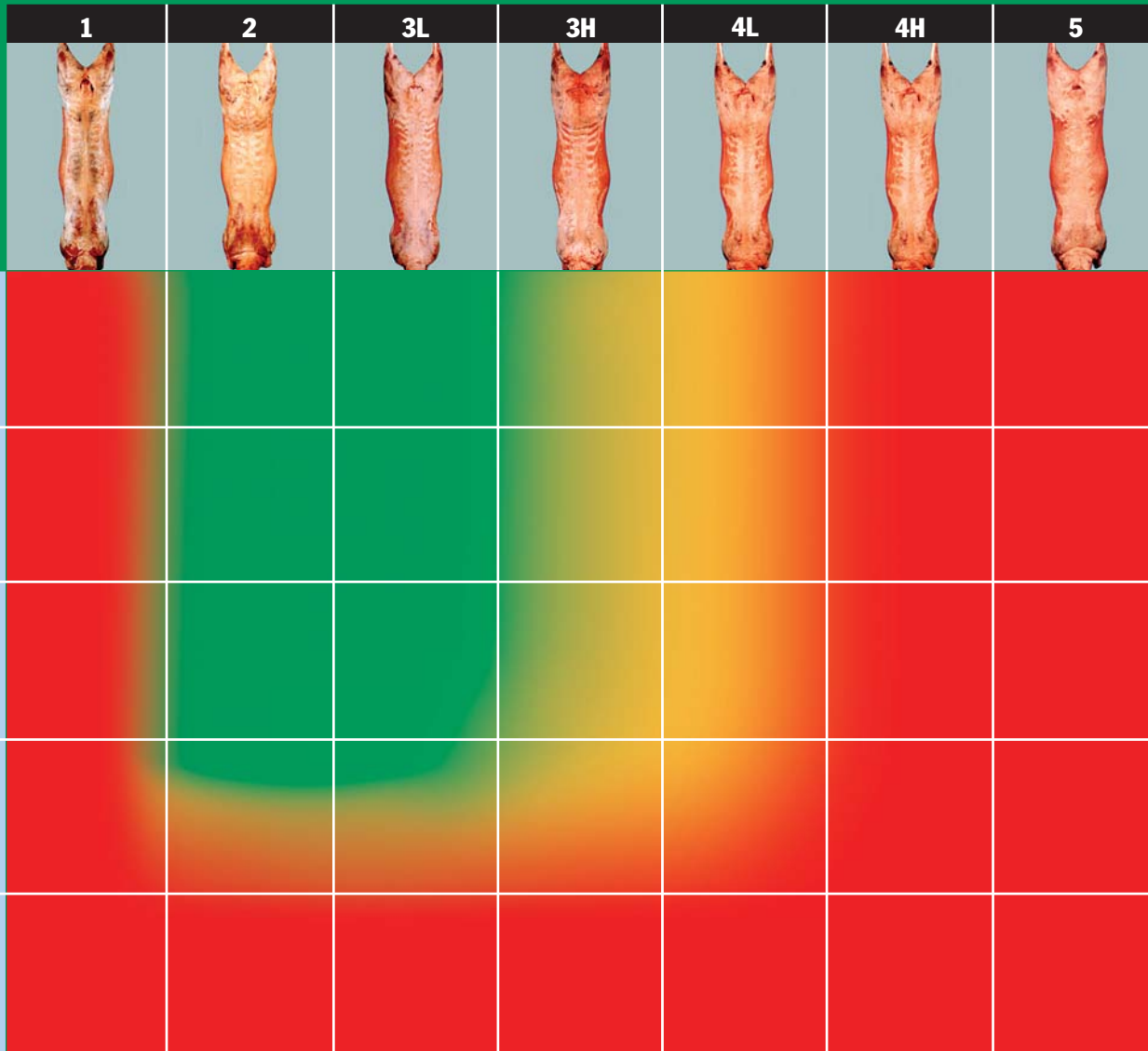


Market requirements

Fat class increasing fatness ➔

Fat is determined by visual assessment of external fat cover. There are five main classes. Class 3 and 4 are subdivided into L (leaner) and H (fatter).

Carcass assessment addresses conformation and fat.
 Fat cover is scored on a 1–5 scale.
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 Combining scores for conformation and fat determines the markets which lambs suit best.



Market signals



- No demand
- Discount prices
- Poorest returns



- Medium demand
- Average prices
- Moderate returns



- High demand
- Premium prices
- Best returns



Better Returns Programme

Before you start

Stand back and have a good look from a distance at the group. Get a general impression of the pigs to judge, general appearance, type, etc. Pay close attention to distinguishing marks, face, etc.

Remember: you are looking for a 'brick on legs' capable of producing top quality meat for the consumer, and will provide a profit for the butcher. Pay more attention to the most expensive cuts, ie ham and loin; with less attention to the 'cheap cuts', ie shoulder and neck.

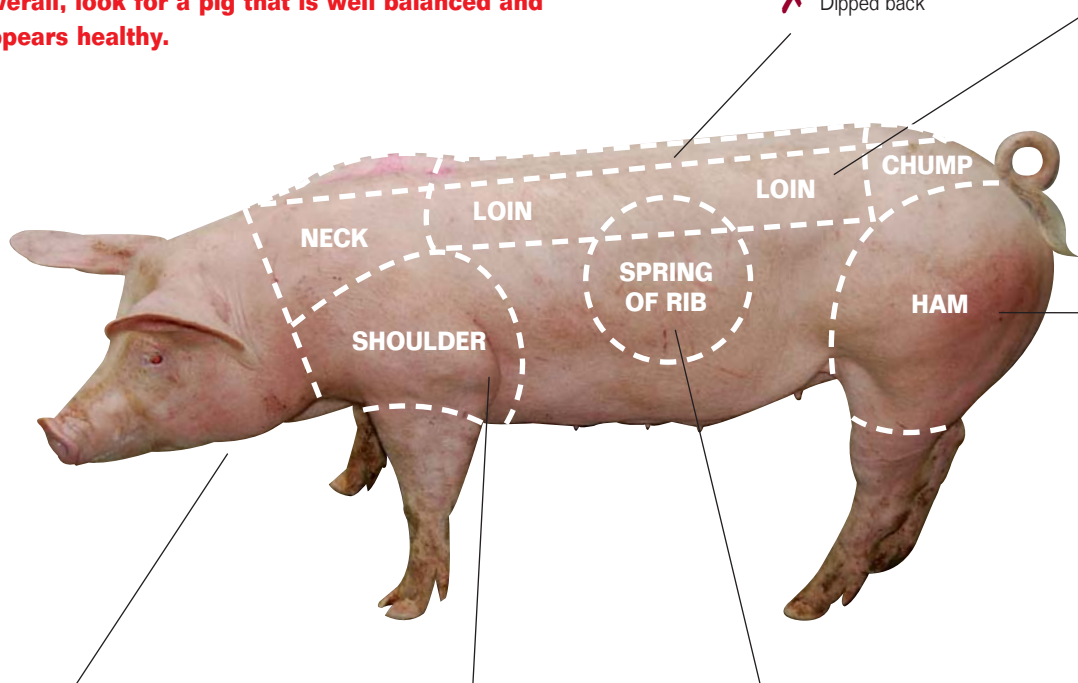
Overall, look for a pig that is well balanced and appears healthy.

Topline

- ✓ Long
- ✓ Wide
- ✓ Slightly arched back
- ✗ Short
- ✗ Narrow
- ✗ Dipped back

Loin

- ✓ Long
- ✓ Deep
- ✓ Full and firm
- ✗ Narrow
- ✗ Short
- ✗ Shallow
- ✗ Soft to touch (fat)



Ham/leg

- ✓ Well-rounded
- ✓ Firm
- ✓ Good fleshing development to the hocks
- ✗ Soft to touch (fat)
- ✗ Lacking fleshing

Head and neck

- ✓ Short and neat
- ✓ Light jowel
- ✗ Heavy jowel

Shoulder

- ✓ Broad
- ✓ Neat and compact
- ✗ Too wide
- ✗ Soft to touch (fat)
- ✗ Unbalanced

Spring of rib

- ✓ Deep
- ✓ Full
- ✓ Wide
- ✓ Well-sprung
- ✗ Flat

Pig carcase



Stand back and have a good look from a distance at the group. Get a general impression of the carcases to judge, general appearance, type, etc.

Be methodical: start at:

- the leg/ham
- then chump
- then loin
- then shoulder

What to look for

- A** Leg/ham
- B** Chump
- C** Loin
- D** Shoulder



Conformation

Overall

- ✓ High proportion of meat to fat
- ✓ Firm, white fat
- ✗ Low proportion of meat to fat
- ✗ Yellow fat
- ✗ Bruised appearance

Leg/ham

For pork pigs refer to the "leg" as in a leg of pork. For bacon pigs refer to the "ham".

- ✓ Well-rounded with meat, not fat
- ✗ Sloping
- ✗ Round with fat, not meat

Chump

- ✓ Convex
- ✗ Concave

Loin

- ✓ Long
- ✓ Deep
- ✓ Full
- ✗ Narrow
- ✗ Short
- ✗ Shallow

Shoulder

- ✓ Neat and compact
- ✗ Heavy
- ✗ Flat

Weight ranges

Weights are approximate and serve as a guide only

	Deadweight	Liveweight
Pork	Up to 55kg	Up to 75kg
Cutter	55kg to 65kg	75kg to 90kg
Bacon	65kg to 85 kg	90kg to 115kg

Useful words and phrases

Delivering your reasons for placing animals or carcasses in a particular order is almost as important as the actual order.

Remember, you are required to give both descriptions of what you have seen and comparisons between the animals or carcasses you are asked to judge.

The following provide some useful expressions that will help you give accurate answers that are both descriptive and comparative, so gaining extra points without going over time.

Descriptive

Bright, bold and alert	Meaty *
Balanced	Muscle development *
Compact	Volume of saleable meat *
Wide/Width	Killing out percentage *
Deep/Depth	Percent of high priced cuts *
Proportioned	Highest proportion of lean:fat *
Strong	Suitable for today's market *
Tremendous	Fat cover *
Prime	Fat colour *
Superb	Area or depth of eye muscle *

Comparative

Sound	Greater
Outstanding	Thicker
Scope	Wider
Fullness	Deeper
Rounded	Better proportioned
Convex/concave	Stronger
Capacity	Shorter
Converter of forage	Narrower
– dairy	Meatier
Fleshy *	

* particularly suited to describing a 'meat animal' when you can refer to its likely carcasse qualities.



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