How to Plan, Organize, and Administrate a Livestock, Dairy, or Horse Judging Contest

Ken Culp, III
How to Plan, Organize, and Administrate a Livestock, Dairy, or Horse Judging Contest

by Ken Culp, III, Department of Animal Sciences

Judging contests have been used in the United States since 1900 as a means of evaluating an individual's ability to judge livestock. Whether for Beef, Sheep, Swine, Dairy, Horses, or any other species, an effective judging contest should be well planned, organized, and timely to provide a sound educational experience. The purpose of this publication is to acquaint the reader with some guidelines and workable methods for meeting these criteria.

An effective judging contest is of great educational value. It trains contestants to quickly make judgemental decisions, given a fixed amount of time, a set of criteria, and a group of animals to evaluate. When this is repeated, class by class, the experience can only strengthen thought and decision-making processes.

In addition, public speaking abilities are developed. A "perfect" set of oral reasons is one which is truthful, accurate, articulate, fluent, and grammatically correct. A judging contest, therefore, builds character and instills self-confidence. Below is a list of the six objectives of a well run and effective judging contest.

Objective 1: To cultivate public speaking abilities, develop poise, and instill confidence through contestants' oral defense of their placings.

Objective 2: To train contestants to be knowledgeable livestock-oriented people who are honest, diligent, and capable of communicating their standards and viewpoints to others in a professional manner.

Objective 3: To train contestants to observe and recognize differences in livestock, and, given a current set of criteria (industry standards), to make sound judgmental decisions and ultimately to arrive at a logical placing.

Objective 4: To impress upon the contestants the need for practical and fundamental production traits and, at the same time, communicate to them that industry moves and that type changes do, over time, serve a useful function and are a viable means of progressing through modernizing and updating industry standards and viewpoints.

Objective 5: To instill in contestants the fundamental awareness that all market animals simply cannot, from a dollar-and-cents production standpoint, be placed strictly by cutability or marketability and that factors such as structural soundness and growth-rate are of equal importance.

Objective 6: To insure consistency among contests, paralleling the Indiana State 4-H/FFA Livestock Judging Contest, and all of the County and Area Contests which precede it, to the National Livestock Judging Contests and to the Collegiate Livestock Judging Contest at Purdue. (It would be highly counter-productive to have a contest antagonistic to those contests to which winning teams advance on the national level. Moreover, a smooth transition would be most beneficial between the State and National Programs, and the Inter-Collegiate Program at Purdue University.)

The first criteria for reaching these goals is to have a chairman or committee in charge of the event. This person/persons must be contest oriented, and should be both articulate and organized. The contest chairman is responsible for many things, including:

- Selecting a Contest Site
- Selecting Classes
- Selecting Official Judges
- Penning, Handling, and Numbering the Animals
- Obtaining Judging Cards and Materials
- Obtaining Awards
- Notifying Coaches of the Date, Place, and Time
- Designating Groups and Reasons Order
- Obtaining Additional Help
- Planning for Lunch

Selecting a Contest Site

Very often, the county fairground is the most convenient place to hold a contest. It is equipped with loading and handling facilities, pens for the livestock, and is set up to handle a large group of people. (Be sure to check and make sure the build-
ings you wish to use are unlocked and have the heat, lights, and restroom facilities in working order.) Offices, restrooms, storage rooms, or outbuildings can be used for reasons rooms. If the weather is agreeable, reasons listeners can also be stationed outdoors.

If it isn’t convenient to hold the contest in a centralized location and you choose to travel from farm to farm to judge, arrangements can usually be made to give reasons at a local school. Contestants could be seated in an auditorium, lecture hall, cafeteria, a classroom, or the Vo-Ag room. Holding the reasons session at a school obviously has the added advantages of workable restrooms, heating, and lighting.

Selecting Classes

The mechanics of the contest are critical to its smoothness and effectiveness. In the final analysis, however, the determination as to whether or not it was a good contest will depend upon the quality of the livestock, the thought process which was involved in selecting them, and how well they fit together as a class. The classes should display a range of quality while testing the ability of the contestants to evaluate them.

The biggest problem with most contest classes is that the animals neither fit nor belong together, and thus the contestants (and officials) have difficulty in finding logical placements for them. In order for classes to be useful, educational, workable, and effective, they must be either placeable, pairable, or “sortable”! Classes should be chosen and designed by a person who is both contest oriented and has had some judging experience.

If this is not possible, the best alternative is to either have the producer furnishing the livestock pick out a logical class (if she is so qualified), or ask the producer to have six animals ready for each placing class she is responsible for. Then, the officials can choose the class before the contest begins.

Probably the two biggest problems areas involve hog classes and steer classes. Almost without fail, the steer class at a county or area livestock judging contest is comprised of a 4-H member’s prospect (show) steers. This practice is acceptable under the stipulation that the class isn’t used as a market class. By and large, show steers are simply not market-ready in March and April, when these contests are generally held. Therefore, they must be considered “prospects” and be “projected” to their endpoint when making an individual judgment. (This is often difficult for contestants to do.)

There are other problems associated with selecting steer classes which can also be generalized to other species. For example, the person in charge of the contest calls a 4-H member, asking “Do you have four steers (lambs, geldings, . . .) which we could use in our judging contest?” The 4-H’er responds, “Well, I have four steers that you’re welcome to use” or “I have several steers, would you like me to bring four?”

There, without ever seeing the cattle, the contest chairman has arranged for the steer class. Often, however, he is so relieved to have that job accomplished that he forgets to inquire about several other important considerations, such as:

- Are the steers comparable in age, weight, and height?
- Do they fit together?
- Are they placable?

Another problem often encountered when the 4-H’er has five or more steers to select from is that he/she wants to “show off” his/her cattle, and only brings the best ones. Very often, this results in an illogical or “problem” class that is difficult to place.

The swine classes sometimes pose problems because producers are unwilling to expose their animals to disease. If the producer is willing to bring hogs to a fairgrounds or central location, there are several details which can contribute to maintaining their health status.

- Require contestants to thoroughly disinfect their shoes or boots, both before and after judging the hog classes. (Be sure the coaches are notified of this early, so that someone doesn’t have to dip new Lizard boots!)
- Provide plastic disposable boots for the contestants to wear while judging the swine.
- Double-fence the hog pens. That is, put the hogs in a pen, and build another pen around it, at least three feet farther outside. Require that the contestants remain outside of the outermost enclosure.
- Use a combination of the above.

Often times, you can explore the possibility of having a swine producer bring hogs to your contest, and then haul them directly from the contest site to a local hog buying station. This greatly reduces the problem of disease transmission.

Yet another possibility, although the least desirable, is to “borrow” enough hogs from a nearby hog market to make up classes. Clearly, this should be used only as a last resort. If you must resort to this as a means of supplying the swine classes, take the time to pick out classes, and do not simply take a gate cut. (It’s very embarrassing and of little educational value to have too few gilt pigs for both a placing and culling class.) When possible, take your swine official along, and let him/her select the classes.

One point to remember when selecting livestock for classes: It’s always better to have too many animals on hand than too few, so it’s a good idea to line up extras. You never know when something will prevent a producer from bringing his/her livestock to the contest. (This seems to be particularly true in a Horse Judging Contest. It always seems like somebody’s horse either comes up lame, gets sick, throws a shoe, or gets sold!) Finally, if you’re fortunate enough to find a producer who is willing to furnish livestock for a class and has performance data, then by all means, use the data!
A few days prior to the contest, the livestock donors should be sent an itinerary containing pertinent contest information. Most importantly, they should know what time you want their livestock to be available.

When the contest is over, be sure to personally thank the livestock donors, and then send a thank you note to them, also. (This will help the next time you, or someone else, desire their services.)

Selecting Official Judges

Great care should be taken to select competent, honest, qualified, and capable officials. In addition they must be “in tune” with the total industry and be aware of the type of animal which is most desirable. Finally, make sure that each official is both capable and qualified to listen to, and give, oral reasons.

Often the producers who furnish the livestock classes are qualified to serve as officials. Sometimes, however, either because of a lack of availability of these persons or to remove bias, it is desirable to seek “outside” help to obtain officials. A good supply of these people can be found at your state’s land grant university. Either contact the Collegiate Livestock Judging Coach or the Department of Animal Sciences, and they’ll be able to help you.

While a committee of three college seniors who have participated in a collegiate judging training/competition program makes a very satisfactory official committee, it is often desirable and advisable to use two university people and one producer (who was university trained). This combination rounds out the committee and gives it more depth and experience.

Also, don’t expect your officials to donate their time or expenses. And, again, don’t forget to follow-up after the contest with a thank you note.

Penning, Handling, and Numbering the Animals

It is usually advisable to judge all classes penned and loose, with the exception of the market lamb, horse, and dairy classes. Just as a good showman can improve a poor animal’s appearance, a poor showman can impair a good animal’s appearance. Loose animals should be numbered on the back with marking chalk or stick-on numbers (see Fig. 1). Make sure the numbers are visible and will stay in place for the duration of the contest. It is very important to make the livestock pens large enough so that:

- everyone can get around the class at the same time and
- the animals have room to move around freely.

When making pens for sheep and swine placing classes (four animals per class), a pen 20 feet square is the minimum size. For cattle, 30 feet square is the minimum. It is much better to make a pen too large than too small. One common mistake that contestants make when judging is that they get too close to the livestock. When a contestant backs off of the class, both size and type differences become more obvious, and a judgemental decision is easier to make. When you increase the pen size and force the contestants to back away from the livestock, they’ll see more, learn more, and do better. Another advantage of a large pen is that the livestock will be easier to move and manage. Pens for Keep/Cull classes should be at least fifty percent larger than those for placing classes.

When judging livestock at halter or racked (sheep), remember that they are always numbered 1 through 4, from left to right, as you stand behind the class (see Fig. 2). To avoid confusion, you should also:

- provide the handler with a corresponding number and number harness or
- number the animals on the back, and make sure they stay in the proper order (from left to right as you stand behind them) throughout the contest.

Figure 1. Location of number on loose animal.

Figure 2. Order of animals at rack or halter.
Obtaining Placing Cards and Materials

The Cooperative Extension Service has ready access to placing cards, scoring sheets, and the materials which are necessary for the contest. If you’re conducting a livestock judging contest which will involve Keep/Cull classes, index cards are adequate, or contestants may use the back of another placing card (see Fig. 3). Simply instruct them to include their name and, or contestant number, class name, and the numbers of the animals to be called.

You should also have a score sheet, pencils, and a calculator on hand. A Hormel card (which is used to quickly score large numbers of cards) is also a handy tool to have, particularly if the tabulators are not familiar with scoring procedures.

![Purdue University Department of Animal Sciences Placing Card](image)

**Figure 3. Placing card. Contestants should mark the numerical order denoting their placing of the class.**

Obtaining Awards

Awards can be simple or elaborate, expensive or low cost, depending on the preferences of yourself or the committee in charge. It is often advisable to solicit sponsors or donors of awards. Area businesses, Ag-related organizations, breed, livestock or producer associations, as well as individual breeders, are often willing to contribute in this way. Be sure to invite sponsors to send a representative to make the presentation, if they so desire.

Awards should be ordered four to six weeks prior to the contest.

Notifying Coaches

4-H leaders, Vo-Ag Teachers, Extension Agents, and other area coaches should be notified of the contest at least six weeks prior to the event.

It is often appropriate (and advisable) to accept advanced registration, particularly if you’re holding an invitational contest. Advanced registration gives you an idea of how many contestants to prepare for and will also speed up registration the morning of the contest.

You should have enough of the details worked out so that when notification is sent to the coaches, you can include both the number and the types of classes which will be involved (Breeding Heifers, Market Lambs, Keep/Cull Gilts, Halter Geldings or Mares, English Pleasure, Lactating Cows, etc.). Also include: 1) the name, address, and phone number(s) of the contest chairman; 2) an itinerary; 3) directions; 4) the entry fee (if any); 5) registration information; and 6) information as to whether contractors will give oral reasons or answer questions (and the number of sets of each). It is essential to include a phone number where someone involved in the contest (preferably the contest chairman) can be reached the day of the event. In case of an emergency, car trouble, etc., you’ll want to know about late arrivals in advance.

It is not necessary at this time to list the official livestock donors, or exact class names (Suffolk EWES, Angus Heifers, Hampshire Barrows, Arabian Halter, 2 yr old Holstein Cows). A few days after the contest, however, you may want to send out the results and include these details.

Designating Groups and Reasons Order

There is a great variety of ways that contestants can be divided into groups. The most important consideration when dividing contestants into groups is the number of classes which will be judged in each rotation. If your contest is set up with a total of nine classes, you’ll probably want to run three rotations of three classes each. If you have 12 classes in your contest, you may choose to have three rotations of four classes each, or four go-rounds of three classes each. Occasionally (particularly if you are traveling from farm to farm to judge and the host producer has pens large enough so that everyone can see the livestock), it may be advantageous for everyone to judge the class simultaneously in the same group.

Another factor to consider when assigning contestants into groups is how the contestants are numbered. The preferred numbering procedure is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contestant Numbers</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team #1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>John Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mike Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Jane Miller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Tom Baker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team #2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Rick Lewis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Sue Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Kevin Edwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Dave Moore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Team numbers progress upwards as high as is necessary. If any contestants judge as individuals, their contestant numbers can start with the 5001 series, increasing by groups of four (5001, 5002, 5003, 5004, 5011, 5012, 5013, 5014...).
If contestants are to be divided into four groups, each contestant whose number ends in 1 is in group 1. Likewise, each contestant number ending in 2 is in group 2, and so on. This organized method of assigning groups prevents teammates from being in the same group.

If, however, you have three groups, it is preferable to have all of the "1's" (contestants whose number ends in a 1) in group 1, all of the "2's" in group 2, and all of the "3's" in group 3. The "4's" need to be split out individually, and 1/3 of them put in group 1, 1/3 of the "4's" put in group 2, and 1/3 of the "4's" assigned to group 3.

To further simplify this matter, color code each contestant number. For example, write each contestant's number in group 1 in green. Group 2 may be in red, and group 3 could be in blue. This should be done some time prior to registration, which greatly simplifies the process of dividing contestants into groups, especially if you're working with a sizeable attendance.

If questions are asked in place of oral reasons in your contest, the contestants should be reassembled in their original groups, either in balconies, on chairs, or at desks after the judging segment of the contest is complete. The contestants should be given the names of the classes, in the order in which the questions will be asked, and given five minutes to study. At the end of that time period, the questions should be distributed (if they have been duplicated) or read aloud. The contestants should be allowed five minutes to answer the ten questions on that class and to fill out their cards.

A reason's order can be devised in various ways. The most important thing to remember when drawing up this order is to be certain that team members never follow each other into the reasons room.

Following are two different examples of reason orders (non-randomized and randomized), both using the same contestants. For simplicity's sake, five teams and four individuals are used in the example.

**Non-Randomized**

```
Cattle   Sheep   Hogs
11       12      13
21       22      23
31       32      33
41       42      43
51       52      53
14       24      34
44       54      5001
5002     5003    5004
```

Explanation: Contestant #11 begins giving cattle reasons. He/she is followed by #21, who is followed by #31, etc. Contestant #11 then begins preparing his/her sheep reasons and follows #5003 into the sheep reasons room. Again #21 follows #11, etc. (Note that since #5001 and #5004 are both individuals, they are not teammates and can follow each other into the reasons room.)

**Randomized**

```
Cattle   Sheep   Hogs
5001     54      12
14       13      24
34       33      51
52       11      32
5003     22      44
23       53      21
42       41      5004
31       5002    43
```

Explanation: The contestants follow the same rotation as was discussed for the non-randomized order. To make a randomized order, simply put all the contestants' numbers in a hat, and draw them out. To remove any bias, you should make sure that at least one and preferably two contestants are between teammates.

The randomized order is preferred, because Team 1 is not always followed by Team 2, etc. as is the case in the non-randomized order. If, for example, Team 1 is very proficient at giving reasons, Team 2 will always enter the reasons room at a disadvantage. This bias is removed by randomization.

In order to keep the reasons session progressing smoothly, several preliminary procedures are necessary. First, someone should arrange the placing cards in the same sequence in which the contestants will enter the reasons room to make their oral presentation. Second, during the reasons session at least one (and often two) contestant(s) should be waiting "on deck" to give reasons. It is very time consuming and frustrating for the officials to have to wait for the contestants. It is often a good idea to have someone posted in the hallway to advise contestants of the proper time and room to enter and to keep things moving along.

**Obtaining Additional Help**

To ensure that your contest runs smoothly, you'll need to select people to serve as group leaders, card runners, and tabulators. Your most capable and qualified people should be in charge of tabulation, and it is imperative that they systematically check their work to insure its accuracy. Coaches sometimes will serve as group leaders if you're shorthanded.

The contest chairman will need to spend a few minutes prior to the onset of the contest briefing the group leaders. They should be instructed as to how they will rotate from class to class during the contest and how much time to allow the contestants to evaluate the animals in each position. (Two minutes side view, two minutes rear view, two minutes front view, four minutes for handling, two minutes close inspection, three minutes side view, etc.) Generally, for reasons/questions classes, fifteen minutes are allowed. For placing classes, twelve minutes is sufficient time. (If the contest is running behind schedule, the time allowance on placing classes can be cut to ten minutes.) Contes-
Contest Instructions
When registration is complete and the contest is ready to begin, the chairman should give some general instructions to the contestants. Points to include are a brief welcome, information about class names, the amount of time which is allotted each class, the designation of classes as reasons or questions classes, and the introduction and recognition of the livestock donors. Group leaders should be introduced and an explanation given as to how the contestants will be divided into groups. Contestants should also be advised as to penalties that will be incurred for talking, cheating, etc.

Planning for Lunch
Whenever possible, the best solution to the problem of “What do we do about lunch?” is to have it catered at the contest site. Groups such as Home-Ec, FHA, 4-H, Porkettes, Cowbelles, Farm Bureau, Cattlemen’s, Pork Producers, etc. are often willing to prepare meals or sack lunches at very reasonable prices. This is preferred over the alternative of letting everyone get lunch on their own, because some coaches tend to use this time to “prepare” or “polish” their contestants’ reason sets.

If you are ordering lunches, be sure to include enough extras so that your helpers and officials are fed. Whether or not you feed the coaches is your option. However, they should be made aware of this decision when they’re notified of the contest.

Contest Follow-Up
When the last contestant gives his/her set of reasons, it is time for the officials to give their placings, cuts, and reasons. As contest chairman, you should find out which class or classes each official will discuss. You should assemble all of the contestants, any coaches who wish to be present, and then introduce the first official, stating his/her name, hometown, occupation and/or qualifications, and the name(s) of the class(es) he/she will discuss. Be sure and finish one species before moving on to the next one. It is essential that every contestant remain long enough to listen to the officials, so as to benefit fully from the educational aspect of the contest.

After all of the official placings and reasons are given and the tabulators have finished checking their work, ascertaining that all ties have been broken by reasons scores, give the contest results in the following order:

Livestock:
Top 10 Individuals in Sheep
Top 10 Individuals in Swine
Top 10 Individuals in Cattle
Top 10 Individuals in Oral Reasons and/or Questions
Top 10 Individuals Overall
Top 5 Teams in Sheep
Top 5 Teams in Swine
Top 5 Teams in Cattle
Top 5 Teams in Oral Reasons and/or Questions
Top 5 Teams Overall

Horses:
Top 10 Individuals in Halter
Top 10 Individuals in Performance
Top 10 Individuals in Reasons
Top 10 Individuals Overall
Top 5 Teams in Halter
Top 5 Teams in Performance
Top 5 Teams in Reasons
Top 5 Teams Overall

Dairy:
Top 10 Individuals in Placing
Top 10 Individuals in Oral Reasons
Top 10 Individuals Overall
Top 5 Teams in Placings
Top 5 Teams in Oral Reasons
Top 5 Teams Overall

Note: In the State of Indiana, and in most other states, the luxury of having a multiple breed dairy judging contest is rarely enjoyed. In collegiate and national contests, however, all breeds are generally represented. In that case, the following order is proper:
Top 10 Individuals in Ayrshires
Top 10 Individuals in Brown Swiss
Top 10 Individuals in Guernseys
Top 10 Individuals in Holsteins
Top 10 Individuals in Jerseys
Top 5 Teams in Ayrshires
Top 5 Teams in Brown Swiss
Top 5 Teams in Guernseys
Top 5 Teams in Holsteins
Top 5 Teams in Jerseys

Note: In presenting species awards in state or national contests, it is quite acceptable to increase the number of top teams mentioned from five to ten.

Be sure and recognize award donors as their respective awards are presented. Invite these donors to be on hand to make the presentation; if they so desire. Recognize the livestock donors again. Thank everyone for participating. Congratulate the winners, and advise the eligible teams of the next contest (area, state, or national). The next day, write thank you’s to every person who helped in any way.

Finally, pat yourself on the back for a job well done!