

Market Steer Projects

Getting Started



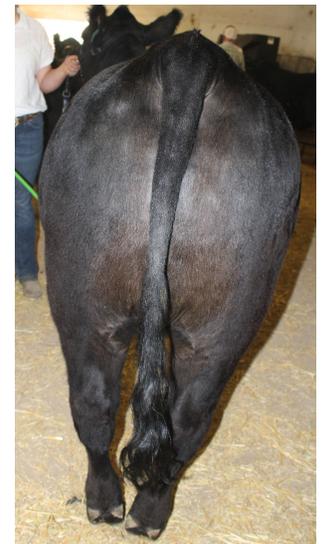
Raising a market steer as a 4-H project can be a very rewarding experience for youth. However, it is important to note up front that raising a market steer requires higher input costs and larger living spaces than all other 4-H livestock projects. A successful market steer project involves a lot of time and effort to train, feed, and clean your animal. If the necessary time and resources are available, raising market steers can be one of the most enjoyable livestock projects that 4-H has to offer. This fact sheet has some tips to get you started with your market steer project.

Selection

The first step in a market steer project, is selecting a quality steer. Market steers are judged on market quality, so it is important to select a beef breed that carries a lot of muscle, has good bone structure, and is nicely balanced. There isn't one single beef breed that has an advantage in a market show, and many choose to crossbreed steers to take advantage of hybrid vigor. Hybrid vigor is when the offspring out-performs its parents. Oftentimes, steers specifically bred for market shows are referred to as "club calves" or "clubby". Because club calves are bred for the sole purpose of producing market show steers, they commonly have an advantage over purebred steers from breeds that have different breeding strategies and purposes. Some cattle breeds are polled, or born without horns. If this isn't the case, make sure your steer has been dehorned.

When selecting a steer, the first area you want to consider is muscle. Natural width and muscle shape are indicators of muscling. Natural width on a steer is evaluated from the front and rear view focusing at the base of the animal. Muscle shape is often evaluated at the rump, but can also be evaluated from the loin, forearm, and shoulder. While muscle is the highest priority in choosing a high quality steer, you should not ignore balance and structure. A good market steer is well balanced, straight through the topline, and level hiped. Good structure can be evaluated by looking at the feet and legs to ensure flexibility, correctness, and functionality. Combining these characteristics is how we determine the ideal market steer.

Another consideration to make when choosing your steer is to get one that is the proper age and size for your target show. Steers typically gain about 2.5 lbs. per day and finish at 14-20 months when healthy and on a good diet. In Utah, exhibitors typically purchase their market steers in the fall (September-December) and show their steers throughout the next summer. Exhibitors commonly purchase steers through auction or private treaty. You will need to weigh your steer often (weekly if possible) to make sure he is on track for your target fair weight.



Notice the natural width of the steer on the left.



This young steer has a nice level topline and a square hip.



Use this handy calculator to determine how big your steer needs to be to reach its target weight at fair:

<https://extension.usu.edu/4H-Livestock-Calculator/beef-weight-calculator>



Additional selection resources can be found here:

<https://boxelder4h.usu.edu/Livestock-Selection-Clinic-Resources>

Nutrition

After you have selected your market steer, the next step is feeding your steer. The basic nutrients that market steers require are water, energy, protein, vitamins, and minerals (Agrilife, 2020). Water is the first and most important element to any nutrition plan. Clean, fresh water should be available to your steer day and night. They should drink anywhere between eight to twenty gallons of water a day (Rasby, 2016).

Market steers eat a combination of grain, hay, and should have free access to minerals. Steers need grain to add extra energy and protein. This is essential for proper weight gain. Ideally, high quality feeds for steers should contain 12-13% protein with grains and corn for energy (Agrilife, 2020). When choosing a specific grain for steers, the best grains are those that are fresh and consistent bag-to-bag (Agrilife, 2020). A forage (usually grass or alfalfa hay) also needs to be included in a steer's diet to help provide the steer with fiber to keep the rumen healthy and happy. The rumen is one of four stomach compartments. When purchasing a steer, find out what type of feed he has been on and if you must, make a gradual change to new feed over the course of several weeks. Bloat is gas build up in the rumen. It is uncomfortable and can be fatal if not treated quickly. Bloat is one issue that market steers fed high quality feeds may develop, especially if they are not fed a balanced diet or their feed is switched too quickly.



Steers should be fed twice daily (morning and night) on a set daily feeding schedule. Consistently feeding the same things at the same time can help improve your steer's performance (Agrilife, 2020). Monitoring your steer's weight gains can be a good evaluation tool to ensure that your nutrition plan is working. Measuring average daily gains can also help you know if your steer will be ready for your target show.

When you go to the feed store, there are lots of supplements available. Other than free choice minerals, you shouldn't need to purchase anything extra. When it comes to nutrition, no magic tricks or supplements can create a winner or correct bad genetics. Champions are born from consistency and hard work. If you provide your market steer with clean, fresh water and a well-balanced diet, there is no need for supplemental products.



This article from Texas A&M is a great resource for additional nutrition information:

<http://counties.agrilife.org/parker/files/2011/10/Market-Steer-Essentials.pdf>

Handling

As an exhibitor, showmanship is one of the few areas that you have complete control. If a steer will not set up correctly or refuses to stand in a line, it will make it harder for the judge to get a good view. Even with good genetics and a high quality nutrition program, poor showmanship can be the deal breaker in the show ring.

In the show ring, an exhibitor will have two tools to help set up their steer: the lead and the show stick. It is important to start handling your steer early so you can effectively use these tools. The first step is to halter break your calf, and then begin using the show stick. Ideally, a first year exhibitor will purchase a calf that is already halter broke. If that's not possible, you'll want to start early when your steer is a calf. Halter breaking begins by properly placing a rope halter on your calf. Once the halter is properly situated, you will let the steer drag the lead for a couple days (Brown, 2020).

Next, you will begin to tie the calf to a sturdy fence. You will start at about an hour and gradually move up to 3 to 5 hours a day (Brown, 2020). Once your calf is used to being tied, it will be easier to get him used to being handled. While he is tied up, brush and talk to your calf. This will tame him and help him get accustomed to you (Brown, 2020). While he's tied, you may want to begin hosing him off. This not only helps him get accustomed to being touched, but is a great way to start training the hair to be ready for show day. This process requires a lot of patience, but if you put the time in at the beginning, it will make for a safer and more successful experience later on.



Another thing to do when your calf is tied is to begin working with the show stick. Begin slowly with the stick, no quick or sudden movements, and definitely no jabbing! Try to find the area where your steer likes to be rubbed with the stick and slowly work to setting the feet from there. When using a show stick to set feet you always want to begin with the rear feet. If you need a rear foot to go back you will gently press the show stick to the soft tissue between the toes of the rear foot. As you apply gentle pressure, you will also want to slowly and gently push backward on the lead. If you need to move a rear foot forward you will pull on the lead and use the hook of the show stick to apply pressure under the dewclaw and gently pull forward. Teaching your steer to quickly set up feet takes a lot of time and patience, but your efforts will pay off on show day.

Last but not least, your calf will need to be trained to walk and stop. You will begin this process once you feel that your steer is halter broke. At first, lead the calf short distances (from feed to water) (Brown, 2020). As your calf gets comfortable with short distances start walking longer distances, adding in practiced stops to help your steer learn when to set up. Make sure that you are practicing with your steer daily so that you are prepared to show! The goal is to enter the showring and have no surprises. Champions are made at home!



If you are looking for more information regarding handling and showing your steer, here is a great resource from Mississippi State Extension for you: http://extension.msstate.edu/sites/default/files/publications/publications/p2210_web.pdf



Photo: Lidd Livestock & Design

Here are some things you should do with your steer on a daily basis:

- Tie up to the fence or chute
- Brush your steer
- Lead with the halter
- Set up legs using the show stick and lead
- Rinse your steer with water only (use shampoo once a week)



These tips will help you get started with a market steer project.

It's always a good idea to work closely with a club leader or an experienced exhibitor for more tips and tricks to make your project a success! Explore other opportunities for junior livestock projects our website: <https://extension.usu.edu/utah4h/programs/livestock>

Cited Sources

Agrilife (2020). Market Steer Essentials. Texas A&M. Retrieved 2020

Brown, R.K. (2020). Beef Showmanship. Mississippi State University. Retrieved 2020