



Executive Secretary
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THOUGHTS

From The Secretary

Mobility has long been a key attraction of the great Brown Swiss cow. If a cow cannot move comfortably she will not eat and thus cannot milk. In all types of operations the foot angle, strong pastern, the sound leg set with correct thurl placement have allowed the Big Brown Cow to thrive on concrete, pasture and in stall barns. Key to this is correct tracking agility both front and rear legs as viewed from the rear; in general cows that track straight have greater mobility.

In the new score card this important structural element is increased in value from the 15% of Foot and Leg to 20% Mobility. The description of Mobility is:

The structure and the movement of feet, pasterns and legs are evaluated. Evidence of mobility receives a major consideration. Listed in priority, the description of the traits are as follows:

Movement- free and comfortable, able to rise and lie down easily. 7%

Feet-steep angle and deep heel with a short well rounded closed toe. 4%

Legs-4%

Front and Rear Legs-tracking straight, wide apart with feet squarely placed

Rear Legs-Side View-a moderate set (angle) to the hock.

Hocks-cleanly molded, free from coarseness and puffiness with adequate flexibility.

Thurl Position- centrally placed between the hip bones and pin bones. 3%

Pasterns-short, strong and flexible. 2%

One of the first questions we get in regards to the new system is how we evaluate Movement. How can we tell if a cow can rise and lay down comfortably? We focus on the

cleanliness of the hocks and pasterns with freedom throughout the legs of any evidence of damage to the muscle. We also pay close attention to signs of crampiness and/or stiffness. In the feet category the steep angle is important but a trait that is of increasing concern is the wide or splayed-toed. This foot has real problems in even distribution of weight either standing or walking. This leads to other structural problems in the foot, pastern, leg, hip and shoulder.

As noted above a feature of the Brown Swiss cow for a long time has been her ability to track straight. This is an element we do not want to lose. Normally there is a relationship between the front and rear legs on this trait. However, this is not always the case. Previously we had no place to truly take into consideration a cow that tracks correctly on her rear legs (sign of correct thurl placement) while having toe out problems through the front legs; normally signs of shoulder problems. The new card allows us to take that combination into consideration as well as the reverse. The other thing to note is a cow that toes in either set of legs loses points. Toes that point in can indicate real skeletal problems in the cow. While still taken into consideration the side view of the rear leg has been shown to be of lesser concern than rear view to productive life. Thurl position is key to the movement of the leg in a proper manner. Pasterns are self-explanatory.

Once again let us return to the three cows; the hippo, beanpole and stylish cows. The hippo is a cow that has little or no sign of problems with movement. While being very straight from the side in her rear leg, she tracks correctly with a hock that is coarse but lacking in puffiness. In addition, her foot has a steep angle with a short pastern. For movement our hippo gets a 90, for feet a 90, for legs an 86 (primarily from the coarseness and straightness), thurl a 90 and pasterns a 90. The hippo gets an 89 for Mobility.

The beanpole has some issues. While tracking nicely from behind, her winged shoulders cause her to toe out severely in the front. This may be the cause of the puffiness found throughout her front knees. Standing in the barn she is uneasy on her legs, shifting weight from leg to leg. Her foot however is steep with adequate heel, pasterns a bit long but showing flexibility in the rear. In addition she has correct thurl position. Her front pasterns are stiff. The beanpole achieves a 75 for movement, an 80 for feet, 71 points is what she reaches for legs, a 91 for thurl and a 79 for pastern. The beanpole gets a 78 for Mobility.

The stylish cow has a slight problem with thurl position. Cows with high pins and weak loins often (but again not all the time) have thurls that are rotated a bit back and down. This can cause a cow to toe out from the rear and can add a bit too much set from the side; problems the stylish cow has. However, through the front end she is straight. Standing in the stall we note a slight amount of scar tissue around the point of the hock on her right rear leg, though she does stand quietly. She has nice but not great feet, a little splayed on the right rear. Her pasterns are correct. For movement she receives an 85, feet a 77, for legs an 83, thurl position a 82 and pasterns an 88. For mobility the stylish cow receives an 83 for mobility.

Next time we will conclude this look at the new score card with the udder system. Remaining at 40% there are no major changes within this breakdown but we do want to review priorities in scoring the udder. Not the least of these is balance between adequate capacity and not too much udder depth and/or looseness of fore udder. We also want to look at the relationship between rear udder width and udder height and how we weight out the values. (Hints: Tea-cup udders are not necessarily a good thing; wide rivers carry more water than deep, narrow creeks.)

Till next time with the Brown Cow with the low somatic cell----Dave