

Cattle Business in Mississippi – April 2017
“Beef Production Strategies” article
Steer Jocks and Cow Sales

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During the spring I catch myself reading countless sale catalogs. Studying pedigrees, looking at pictures and figuring out what bulls will sire a farm’s next calf crop all intrigue me. While most of you know me as a numbers guy, I love a good looking animal. I sometimes find myself looking at fuzzy-haired steer prospects and clipped up show heifers. While sometimes I question the functionality and real-world practicality of some of these cattle they are sure easy on the eyes and make raising cattle fun (for some). I think when we step away from the frills and hype of the showing, we can all agree that performance-based cattle should and show cattle should share the traits of structural soundness, muscling, and fleshing ability. As all important traits in the pasture and showing are dependent on a solid foundation, this article will describe what I look for in an acceptable structured animal.

To most, structural soundness describes how sound an animal moves. In my opinion, it covers the entire skeleton or structure of the animal. From an importance aspect, I like to think of structure from the ground to the spine and from the rear to the head. The best place to begin a structural appraisal of an animal is its feet. When I look at feet, I want all toes to point forward and be similar in size. Uneven toe size on a foot indicates uneven wear and could be a sign of an unsound animal. I also look for twists, screw claw, founder foot, and cracks in the hoof wall. Moving up the legs, I like to see a soft, flexible pastern joint. Pasterns that ‘pop’ when an animal moves are an indication of poor structure. The hock joint on the back leg should be flexible,

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For more information about beef cattle production, contact an office of the Mississippi State University Extension Service.