



Beef Center

National Center for Beef Excellence

Photo

Sale animal photography is a very important aspect of promotion and presentation for your breeding program. Images which illustrate your animal's confirmation and quality can greatly increase value and interest on sale day, while lower quality images can be detrimental for your animal as well as set the wrong impression for buyers that are researching your breeding program. Here are some basic tips which will help you as a consignor create the best results for the promotion of your sale animal.

Lighting

Lighting is the first important element of a good livestock photograph. The photographer should have the sun at their back to ensure full lighting of the animal subject, which reduces shadows which can distract the eye. Shadows can also appear to reduce the amount of muscle and power in the animal's conformation, particularly if they are in the flank. Finally, when photos are printed in ads and catalogs, a fully lit image will reproduce with the most image quality and eye appeal.

Pen Setup

A proper photo pen can make your photography day more enjoyable and create the best results for your cattle. Depending on your camera lens, it is generally best for the photographer to be 25-40 feet away from the animal while the picture is taken. This allows the photographer to be out the animal's flight zone, while providing the proper overall balance to the animal's conformation in relation to the photo frame. This leads us to generally use a photo pen which 50-60 feet wide and deep. This width also makes it easier to position the animal in a proper photo pose, without contributing added stress in moving it into that position.

As herd animals, cattle are most comfortable when they can see and smell other cattle that they are familiar with. Sometimes singling an animal out to place them in a picture pen will create some distress, so we recommend having a pen with other animals next to the photo pen. This can also make it more convenient to bring animals in that are the next to be pictured, and can even help in getting their attention once they set up in the picture pose.

Footing in the picture pen should be flat and free of obstructions such as rocks, clods and uneven ground. If there is some slight slope to the footing, position the animal going up hill to create a level topline, flexed hip muscles and proper conformation balance.

Help

We generally recommend 2-3 helpers on picture day to assist with animal placement and bringing animals in and out of the pen, which allows the photographer to be in the right place and the right time to take the picture. It's important that these helpers be experienced with cattle and understand their flight zones. It's also important to communicate your goals and objectives to the helpers, so they can help position the animal without agitating it. Once set in the picture pose, these helpers can then be in a

good position to make gentle noises and draw attention to get the ears up on the animal to show it as alert and in a positive manner. Occasionally, if an animal becomes nervous, these helpers should retreat back to the back of the pen and out of its flight zone until the animal relaxes.

Picture Pose

Most cattle pictures you see are in a very certain pose-with the back leg nearest the photographer slightly back, and the front legs either even or perhaps the front leg nearest the photographer slightly forward. By positioning the back leg a little back, it strengthens and levels the topline, flexes the hip, and shows the testicular development of bulls and udder quality of mature cows. By positioning the front legs evenly or with the near leg a little forward, it allows for a natural but alert neck and head set once they helper asks for that animal to bring its ears up. Head position is personal preference, but it is usually facing directly forward to possible back towards the photographer about 15 degrees. Again, its important for the animal to be on relatively flat ground or perhaps with its front legs on a slight incline.

ID

Once an animal's photo session is complete, we usually take a picture of a handwritten card with the ID of that animal. Once you download the images, this placeholder indicates the completion of that animal and the start of the next one to be photographed. Once the perfect image is selected for the animal on the computer, we rename that file by the animals herd ID to make it easy to reference in the future.

Number of photos

We often take several photos of each animal, to ensure that we have selection in the final images which shows it in the best manner. Often once the animal is comfortable and understands it has nothing to worry about, we reset the picture pose once or twice more to give us more options in what we get. With the advent of digital cameras, we no longer worry about film costs-so it's not unusual to have 10-30 pictures per animal.