



Brief answers  
to short questions  
**Sheila's  
Shorts**  
By Sheila Miller

As a follow-up to my last week's column, I thought I'd try to tackle the subject of how pork is evaluated. And, as in beef, I am going to fall back on the knowledge of the National Livestock and Meat Board when it comes to the why's and wherefores.

In the past few years, the meat industry has seen rapid changes in the type of hogs selected as grand champions at local fairs and state livestock shows. While on the hoof, these prize-winning hogs reflect the judge's opinion on what is best, and this is hopefully based on the final end-product that animal was bred for — hams, pork chops, and bacon.

But even more important to today's swine than the judge in the show ring, the modern hog has been molded by the consumer. Purchase power tells the hog producer what the families in the U.S. and worldwide want and demand in the pork products they buy.

Since most hogs are marketed within a small weight range, the U.S.D.A. has been able to establish strict standards of how long the best slaughter hog should be, along with the amount of fat it carries, and the size of chops. Actually, they measure the area of the longissimus dorsi muscle at

the tenth rib — a rigid criteria.

Hog breeders and commercial hogmen have responded to the public's demand for less fat and more lean meat by trying to raise trimmer, meatier hogs. The leaner cuts have become more fashionable in our thin-conscious society, making ham, loin, and shoulder blade cuts most popular.

According to NLMB's Meat Evaluation Handbook, pork carcass evaluation is based on the expected yield of the four lean cuts — ham, loin, arm picnic, and Boston butt. It also considers the quality of the lean — the meat's firmness and color, the amount of firmness of fat, and the meat's marbling and texture.

To refresh your memory, marbling is the speck flecks, or fat deposits in the muscle that adds juiciness and flavor to the meat. And texture is the size of the fiber bundles that make up the muscle, either coarse or fine.

Reflecting the recent trends to low-fat diets, the NLMB reports that during the past twelve years, tests run by a Mid-west experiment station have shown an increase of ham and loin percentage of carcass weight from 32.3 percent to 42.6 percent.

The 1800 barrows measured also showed decrease in the amount of backfat, going from 1.64 inches thick to 1.25 inches thick. The loin eye, or muscle at the tenth rib, increased in area from 3.22 square inches to 4.74.

The lean-cut yield of an individual hog is a direct relation to the amount of finish or fat on the carcass. Finish is measured by taking the average backfat thickness at three spots along the hog's back — at the first rib, last rib, and last lumbar vertebrae.

NLMB suggests an average backfat thickness of about one inch to be optimum for a hog weighing 140 pounds, dressed.

After fat and percent lean cuts available from the hog carcass, the trained eye should look for the curve and bulge of the carcass. Hopefully, it will be plump in the right spots, — the ham, loin, shoulder, and belly.

NLMB points out the length of the carcass is not necessarily related to the carcass value or the amount of meat that it will produce being increased. However, length is used in the certification standards of pork carcasses.

Let's take a closer look at one of the favorite cuts in pork, the hams. Each hog comes equipped with two potential Easter or Christmas delicacies. Whether fresh or cured, there are certain things that make one ham better than another.

What does a terrific ham look like. Well, once again referring to the expert opinion of NLMB, a desirable muscled ham is both broad and deep with the

meatiness extending toward the hock of the hog's leg. This gives the consumer more of the most preferred ham section, the center steaks.

And, the hams should not be covered with an excessive amount of fat, because in the commercial trade, this fat is trimmed off on the upper two-thirds of the ham, with the lower part left on. In either case, it means waste.

NLMB goes on to describe the high-quality ham as one where the cut lean surface is firm, fine-textured, and uniformly bright, greyish-pink. In cured hams, this color will be changed slightly through processing.

The muscle should contain a uniform and extensive amount of firm, white marbling. The outside finish should also have the firm, white fat and it should be dry, with smooth skin.

Variations in this high-quality ham range in color from dark red, to almost pure grey, or the ham could be two-toned in color, with the meat becoming darker as it nears the bone. Inferior hams also tend to have a coarser texture and may appear soft and watery, a weeping ham.

Getting back to the hog carcass as a whole, the process of grading involves all the points mentioned. But, it differentiates between gilts and barrows, and sows. Boars and stags are left out of the grading system completely.

In the gilts and barrow category, the carcasses are separated into two major areas — those with acceptable or unacceptable lean.

Those that are pulled off into unacceptable row are graded U.S. Utility. Their bellies may be too thin for bacon production, or they may have soft and oily carcasses which throw them into Utility regardless of other quality factors.

Acceptable carcasses are divided into U.S. No. 1 through No. 4. These U.S.D.A. grades are set up to estimate the percent of yield of the four lean cuts, with U.S. No. 1 yielding 53 percent or more, U.S. No. 2 yielding 50 to 52.9 percent, U.S. No. 3 with 47 to 49.9 percent, and U.S. No. 4 bringing up the tail end with everything less than 47 percent.

As in any standard, there are variations and reasons for them. Judgment by Federal inspectors on the amount of fat, lean muscle, length, and muscling however, will be the final determining factor in the grading of pork carcasses.

These grading standards help hog producers and consumers, receive the benefits in cost and payment for the high quality pork marketed, and encourage producers of the inferior hog carcasses to improve in order to get top dollar.

Sponsored by



Farm Show Coliseum Harrisburg

April 26-27, 1980

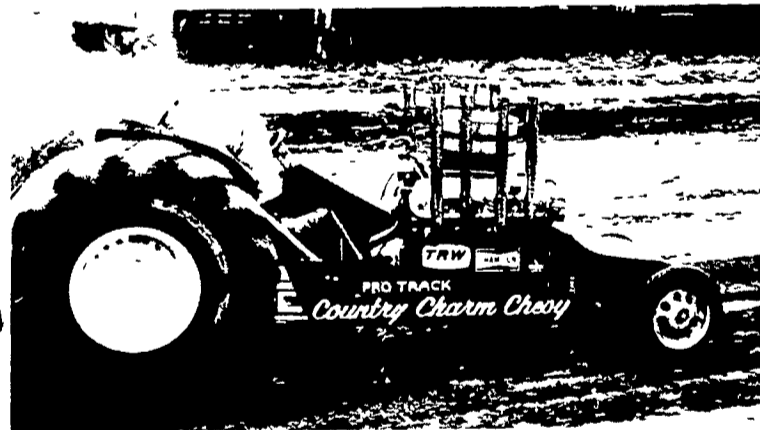
Class A



Grand National  
Circuit Event

N.T.P.A. Grand National  
Four Wheel Drive  
**TRUCKS**  
and  
**Mini TRACTORS**

**PULL**  
The top trucks and  
minis in the nation



Days of April 26-27 — TICKETS PURCHASED AT THE DOOR \$6.00

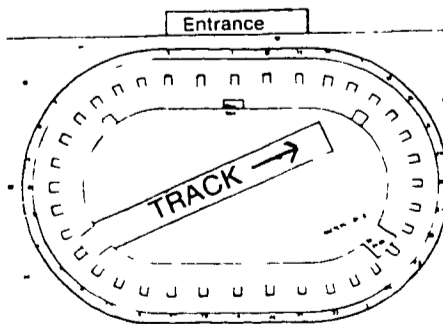
ADVANCE TICKETS

Sat., April 26 - 7 00 p m. \_\_\_\_\_ at \$5.00  
1550 Mini - 5500 Open Truck  
Sun., April 27 - 2 00 p m \_\_\_\_\_ at \$5.00  
1750 Mini - 6500 Open Truck  
Total Amount Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_

Enclose self-addressed stamped envelope with remittance to  
PTPA  
P O Box 157  
New Holland, PA 17557  
717-354-8600

Lower 12 rows - reserved seats  
All other - open seating



Mark Preferred Section — 1st Choice X  
2nd Choice XX  
3rd Choice XXX

No personal checks accepted  
after April 1, 1980.

