

Current Status Of Linear Type Evaluation In Judging Contests

Gary W. Rogers and
Dale R. Olver
Department of Dairy and
Animal Science
The Pennsylvania State
University

Dairy cattle judging contests have played an important role in the development of youth in the US for several decades. Judging contests help youth become better decision makers by forcing them to think on their feet. In addition, these contests provide excellent experience in oral communication. As a consequence, many people involved in youth education feel that the experience of participating in judging contests is very positive and that these contests play an important role in developing young leaders.

Dairy judging contests routinely require youth to place 6 to 12 classes of animals, with 4 animals in each class, and present oral reasons on 2 to 6 classes. This general format has not changed very much for at least 40 to 50 years in most areas of the US with the exception of inclusion of linear scoring in some contests sponsored by FFA. Livestock judging contests utilized a similar format to dairy contests until the 1980s when additional exercises were added to many livestock contests. These exercises include the inclusion of performance data along with the physical qualities of animals and additional groups of animals where some animals are designated as culls and others as keepers (keep/cull classes). In addition, livestock contests have had evaluation components for evaluating live animals for carcass traits.

Linear type evaluation began in dairy cattle in the early 1980s. It is safe to say that linear evaluation has changed dairy cattle breeding and selection dramatically. We now know more about the economic importance (or lack of economic importance) of physical characteristics in dairy cattle as a result of routine linear type trait evaluations. Currently, linear type traits are used in making sire selection decisions in breeding programs all around the world. In addition, linear type traits are used in a large part of the US dairy population for deciding which sires to use on specific cows, a practice called corrective mating by the breeding industry.

Although many judging contests have changed very little over the past several decades, the dairy industry has made enormous progress. Breeding and management programs have changed dramatically and this change has led many people to conclude that judging contests could be enhanced by the addition of new activities. At Penn State, we have included linear type evaluations in local contests for almost 10 years. Linear scoring has been added to traditional collegiate judging and evaluation courses at many universities. In recent years, linear type scoring has been an option for contestants at the PA All-American Dairy Cattle Judging Contest. Last year the national judging contest in Madison, WI experimented with an optional linear component. In 1999, collegiate coaches voted to exclude linear results in the overall rankings for the National Intercollegiate Dairy Judging Contest. Instead, awards for high

contestants and teams for linear evaluation were presented. To this date, none of the major regional or national contests include the linear scoring component as part of the overall ranking of participants or teams with the exception of FFA contests. Contest managers and team coaches ultimately will decide if linear scoring will become an official part of judging contests.

Although linear type scoring in judging contests is very new, we have good information on how to handle the technical aspects of including linear scores in judging contests. Research at Penn State (in cooperation with the University of Florida and the University of Wisconsin) involving youth from several locations around the US has shown that contestants can be effectively ranked based on linear scores of 4 or more cows.

NFO Endorses Pivotal Senate Concentration Bill

AMES, Iowa — Recently the National Farmers Organization (NFO) endorsed The Farmers and Ranchers Fair Competition Act, a Senate bill designed to combat growing economic concentration in agriculture.

"The nation's farmers and ranchers are laboring under incredible financial pressures, stemming, in part, from a lack of competition for their products," said National Farmers President Paul Olson. "In the last decade and a half, the farmers' share of the food dollar has shifted away from those producers into the hands of agribusiness, which is causing incredible economic

hardship on those farm families."

Prices that determine producers' income for some ag commodities are at 25-year lows.

The Farmers and Ranchers Fair Competition Act would help control anticompetitive practices by multinational agribusinesses that hurt producers and would halt mergers that contribute to the economic devastation being encountered in rural America.

"The most critical component to the survival of independent producers are the prices they receive," Ag Policy Analyst Gene Paul emphasized. "Because of increased concentration

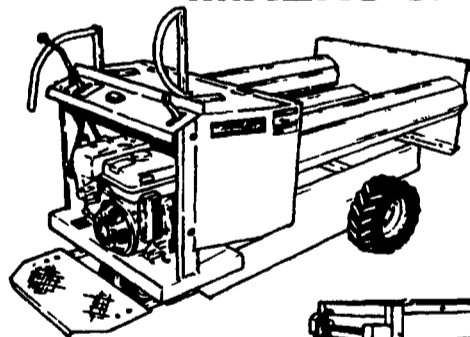
Many breeding companies support the concept of including linear scoring in contests because of the importance of linear scoring in the improvement of dairy cattle. However, the recent vote by collegiate coaches means that linear scoring will not be formally included in contests anytime soon. For now, it appears that collegiate students will have opportunities to compete in linear evaluation, but these opportunities will be separate from overall contest results that only include class placings and oral reasons.

in agriculture, markets are not open, fair or competitive, and these conditions must be reversed."

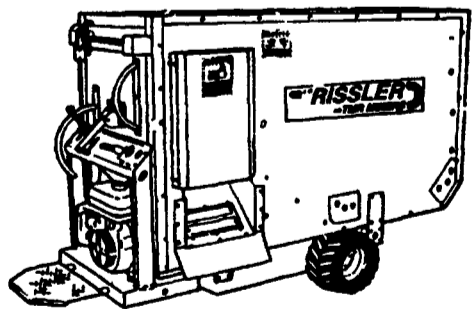
At its most recent national convention in January, National Farmers members ratified a resolution calling for an investigation and divestiture of corporations who control several segments of the food industry.

Representing agricultural producers since 1955, the farm organization has repeatedly spotlighted the growing anti-competitive climate, and believes the Senate bill could begin a trend toward restoring 'equitability to those who produce America's food and fiber.

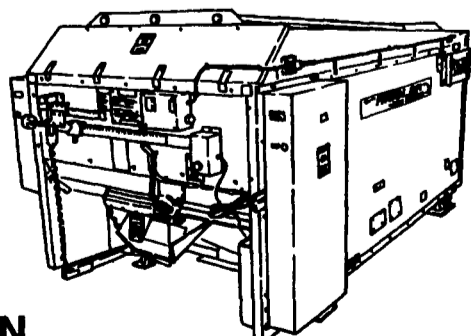
I.H. RISSLER™ - MIXERS & FEEDERS



ROUND BALE
FEEDERS



MIXING CARTS



STATIONARY MIXERS

STANDARD ON ALL MIXERS

- * Poly-Clad Plywood Sides
- * Heavy-Duty Mixing Chain
- * Stainless Steel Floor & Trough
- * Discharge Magnets
- * Beam Scales

PRACTICAL IN DESIGN
DEPENDABLE IN ACTION

I.H. RISSLER MFG. COMPANY

448 Orchard Road
Mohnton, PA 19540 Phone: 717-484-0551

Regional Dealers

R.L. BAUGHMAN & SONS
BARN EQUIPMENT
TOWNVILLE, PA
814-967-4115

ED RISSLER MFG
NEW ENTERPRISE, PA
814-766-2246

CEDAR CREST EQUIPMENT
LEBANON, PA
800-646-6601

THOMAS L. ZARTMAN
EPHRATA, PA
717-733-1050

McDOWELL IMP. CO.
GROVE CITY
814-786-7955

ROVENDALE AG & BARN EQUIP
WATSONTOWN, PA
570-538-9564

HESS EQUIPMENT
SALES & SERVICE
MIFFLINBURG, PA
570-966-1998

STAR SILO
MYERSTOWN, PA
1-800-431-7709

LANCHESTER FARM SERVICE
NARVON, PA
610-273-9060

VIRGINIA HARVESTORE
TROY, VA
800-891-8786

JOE MARKOVITCH
MONTROSE, PA
570-278-3637

DAIRYMEN SPECIALTY CO.
HARRISONBURG, VA
540-433-9117

CEDAR GROVE FARM STORE
SHIPPENSBURG, PA
717-532-7288

McMILLEN BROS.
LOYSVILLE, PA
717-789-3961

M & M BARN SALES
HARRISON VALLEY, PA
814-334-5452