

Mount 'n Cattle

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Ranch Grand Champions

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It's fair time! Watching kids take a project they have worked hard on to the county or state fair is a highlight of the summer.

There is a certain nostalgia of the fair and maybe even a rite of passage for rural youth. Showing livestock at a fair is a great way for youth to learn responsibility, hard work, and take pride in something they have accomplished.

With all the focus on the "grand champions" in the show ring, I'd like to challenge producers how "ranch grand champions" might be evaluated and selected.

I bet the show ring champions and the ranch champions will be judged by a vastly different set of criteria.

What would the criteria for the ranch champion cow be? I would guess an animal's ability to perform on the ranch. Ranch performance is often measured with the outputs from the cow (calf weight), but many times less attention is given to the inputs she requires. The "ranch grand champion" would have relatively high outputs with minimal inputs. Inputs on an individual cow basis are harder to measure but, by selecting animals that perform under less than ideal conditions, the low-input cows will likely rise to the top.

I've visited several well-run ranches. Producers are likely to point out a cow that has been with them several years and always seems to bring home a good calf. The real test of her "champion-ness" would require a good set of records that would include the weight of her weaned calf in relation to her body weight. That ratio, along with the rancher's knowledge of any additional TLC that cow required, would provide a pretty good idea of the money makers on the ranch.

I'd like to see a cow walk (or run as the case may be) into the show ring for "ranch grand champion" and a rancher get on the microphone and give a description something like this:

Ol' number 314 may not look like much with that one bad eye and froze up ears, but she's been an awfully good cow. We've had her in the herd for 13 years now, and every year she's brought home a calf that weighs almost half as much as she does. She keeps her condition without much help from the hay stack or feed truck – even last winter when it snowed up so bad she was out there digging for feed while the others were waiting at the gate. She stays out of the creeks in the summer except to get her mid-day drink and only gets high headed when she has a right to. I've never had to mess with

her when she's calving and she always takes good care of her calves, teaching them what plants on the ranch are good and which ones to stay away from. I know you can see a few ribs, but I'd bet the ranch that she'll be bred when the vet checks her out next month.

That sounds like a "ranch grand champion" to me.