CHAPTER 2

Steps in Fitting

AFTER ANIMALS have been selected for the show herd, the next step is fitting. An average of seven to eight weeks should be allowed for fitting cattle. Some may take more time than others. Very thin and shallow animals require more time to reach their peak, while an over-fat animal must have some of the surplus taken off, and this, too, takes time. When the show season starts in the first part of August, the animals should be brought in about the first part of June. When there are several shows to attend, the animals that are in the hands of capable herdsmen will improve each week that they are on the road until the time that they are brought home. If this is because of the extra time, then it would seem that the eight-week period of fitting is none too long.

When there are several fairs to attend, or a circuit that covers a long period of time, see that the animals are not brought to their peak too soon. It is not practical to have them at their best condition before the fair, or at the time of the first fair if several shows are to be attended. The animals should be brought along so as to be in a condition of "doing well," becoming a bit better each week, until finally at the time of the big
JUNIOR YEARLING BULL

Curtiss Candy Invincible


Here is a calf showing great depth of chest, ribs, and flank. He also has a strong topline and clean dairy hindquarters.
show, they will be at their best. This will prevent much of the staleness and over-conditioning that we often see.

**Quarters for Fitting**

Almost any farm has places that are satisfactory for fitting show cattle—an elaborate setup is not needed. The animals should be kept in a place where they can be tied up, as at the show. When fitting a full string, open heifer sheds and machine sheds are good. For just a few, box stalls, horse stalls, or similar places where they may be tied will serve very well. Screening against flies is desirable, but not as essential as it used to be if you use the modern fly repellents and haul the manure away each day.

The animals' comfort is important, and proper ventilation of their quarters cannot be stressed too much. A number of windows or doors will help provide cross ventilation to remove the dead, hot air that collects in a barn where cattle are kept. Heifer and machine sheds entirely open on one side meet these requirements, but they are better if windows or sections in the opposite wall can be taken out for cross ventilation.

To help keep out the hot rays of the sun, burlap bags that have been ripped apart and dyed a dark color may be hung over the windows on the sunny side of the barn. At night, or when the sun no longer shines in these particular windows, the sacks should be removed for better ventilation. It may be necessary to close the building at times in case of cold wind or rain.

**Tying**

For tying the animals, leather halters are preferred over rope halters. Rope will often rub off the hair it
contacts, and if the rope gets wet during watering or feeding it will tighten up. This may result in a severe sore place on the animal’s head, and a rope halter may get so tight that the animal cannot easily eat.

The tie rope on the leather halter should be made of about \( \frac{3}{8} \) inch rope, some 5 to 6 feet long, and fastened to the wall about 22 inches up from the floor. The animal should be tied about 2–3 feet long, depending on the size of the animal and the height of the rail. Some animals may have to be tied two ways if they are

Fig. 2.1—Tying bulls. The chain runs up through the nose ring and fastens around the horns. An alternate method is described in the text. The rubber tube protects the head and horns from injury. Note also the strap around the neck.
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mean to the animals on either side of them, or steal feed from their neighbors.

Bull calves may be tied with halters, without tying them with their nose rings. This will also apply to junior and senior yearlings in many cases. However, all bulls should be tied with a neck strap also to prevent their getting loose to cause injury to other animals or perhaps to breed a heifer or cow in heat. Older bulls should be tied with strong neck straps and ropes in addition to tying by their rings. A satisfactory way of tying an older bull is to use the neck strap plus a rope 4–5 feet long with a 2–3 foot length of light chain on the end of the rope. This chain is run up through the bull’s ring and snaps onto a ring that is on a horn strap that buckles around the horns. The rope is then tied to the wall or tie rail. Light chain is better than rope here because when it gets wet with water or feed it will not stiffen and chafe the bull’s nose. Then too, it will not rot out and break in some emergency. This method of tying also helps prevent the bull from pulling the ring out of his nose, since most of the pull will be on the strap around his horns.

It is a good idea to have two rings in the noses of senior yearling and older bulls. In case one ring breaks, the other will still hold. A bull calf 8 months old, that is going to be shown, is old enough to have a ring put in his nose. Bulls will handle and eat better if the ring is put in at an early age.

Cows should be put in the show string at the same time as the bulls and heifers if their pasture and feeding conditions are not favorable. However, in the case of
SENIOR YEARLING BULL

Curtiss Candy Levity Peer


Notice the scale and great length of body of this senior yearling bull. His clean, masculine head shows breed type, and his long fine neck is desired in a dairy bull. Observe the straight hind legs and clean thighs.
cows on test, they usually are being well fed with liberal amounts of hay in addition to the pasture. They probably are being kept in out of the sun during the hot part of the day, so they are just as well off in the milking string until about 2 or 3 weeks before leaving. However, if a cow is thin and out in the sun during the day, she probably would do better if brought in and given the much-needed attention of the showman.

**Breaking to Lead**

As the animals are being brought in and tied up, one generally finds that many of them need breaking to lead. This is especially true of the calves and yearlings. If these are tied up for three or four days before trying to lead them, they will learn more quickly. By this time they may have gotten over some of their nervousness and be tired of standing still and want exercise.

When animals are taken out for the lesson, they should have a strong show halter on, for they are better controlled by this type than by the tie halter. Generally, a show halter with an entire strap lead rather than one with a chain lead will get better results. However, there may be individuals that need a chain lead.

Taking the calf out often for frequent, short periods of time is better throughout the training period than for long sessions two or three days apart. The first few times out for a calf should be short, for it is apt to get stubborn and mad, and nothing will be accomplished. On more stubborn cases the leader should get several feet in front of the animal and use a series of quick, strong tugs (*not jerks*). The calf will get the idea and begin to move forward. Also, by turning in a small
circle it will be easier to get the animal to move. Much of this hard work can be avoided if the calf is broken to lead at an early age.

As the animal begins to lead easier, whether it be a calf or aged cow, it should begin to be trained to lead and stand properly. The head should be held up and alert—not too high on weak-backed animals. The animal should step ahead easily and not have to be pulled. It should stop easily and quickly with its feet squarely under it. The animal should be trained to walk with steps that are somewhat short, and to walk slowly and yet with spirit—head and ears up! Walking them slowly may be accomplished by holding the halter lead strap short with the left hand and slowing the animal down by pushing back with the right hand just above the shoulder joint. The patience and time spent here will be rewarded in the show ring.

Leading and training exercises the animal, which is important in fitting. It also helps develop straight hind legs and good shoulders. Exercise aids in circulating the blood and lymph, which in turn helps to maintain a good appetite and a healthy animal.

**Turning Out at Night**

During the warm summer nights it is a good practice to turn the animals into small lots, or paddocks, where there is turf but not an unlimited amount of grass. Too much grass is not wanted as it tends to cause some looseness of the bowels and the animals will not develop the wide deep middle that is desired.

Hay should be available for the animals during the night.
Curtiss Candy Signal Ned


This Brown Swiss bull is smooth over the shoulder and withers, has a good topline and a level rump. Also, is deep through the ribs and straight in the hind legs.
Steps in Fitting

Turning out at night gives the animals a chance to exercise and to cool off. They should be divided as to size, of course, and to prevent injury, should not be crowded. The bulls may be turned in individual pens, if available. Females in heat should be kept in the barn. If they are out with the other animals, either they or another cow or heifer may be injured by the riding they will do. Also, the violent exercise will tend to take off some of their middles.

During hot weather, if the barn is cleaned after letting the animals out in the evening, it will cool out quicker. The animals will come in the next morning refreshed, into a cool barn that is not full of hot, stagnant air. This works especially well for the cows.

Blanketing

A good deal of judgment must be used in blanketing show animals during the summer. When the weather is warm, the cattle will be more comfortable without blankets if the flies are controlled by insecticides, screens, darkening of the quarters with sacks over the windows, and by keeping the manure picked up and hauled away. If the flies are troublesome a light blanket will add to the comfort of the animal.

Blankets are seldom necessary in the summer for hair conditioning if proper feeding and grooming methods are followed. However, if an animal has old dead hair to shed out, a blanket will help produce a glossy hair coat and pliable hide in less time.

In cooler weather the animals may have to be kept in at night, and blankets put on both day and night to
slow the growth of the long winter hair in some breeds and to keep the hair coat lying down smoothly. This does not apply as much to the Ayrshires as to the other breeds, as the growth of long hair is often encouraged in fitting Ayrshires. This long hair makes Ayrshires look deeper, and an experienced showman can do much in clipping the long hair to help make the animal look as near the ideal type as possible.

Most blankets are made of duck or canvas material and wear for a long time. They should be brushed clean each day and washed when dirty. A lightweight blanket is preferred in warm weather. Burlap blankets, homemade or purchased, may be used for fitting at home and for traveling between shows. They are cool, keep the flies off, and the hair lying down. However, duck blankets make a more pleasing appearance, wear longer, and generally are more satisfactory. Certainly duck blankets should be used at the shows.

Lined blankets, or very heavy ones, are not necessary as they are much too heavy and hot. If for any reason you want additional warmth, you can use a “sweat blanket” underneath the duck blanket. The sweat blanket is a light cotton sheet blanket used underneath the show blanket while the animal is drying after being washed.

Many show men fasten the rear leg straps of the blanket by crossing them behind instead of running them between the legs. That is, the left strap goes behind the animal and hooks on right side, and the right strap is fastened on the left side. On cows, this will prevent chafing between the udder and legs. Also, it
will save time when you remove the blanket, as the two rear straps will not have to be unfastened and fastened again when putting the blanket back on the animal.

**Washing**

The cattle should be washed soon after they are brought into the show string. This will remove a lot of the dirt, grime, and discoloration from the hair, and will make the animals more attractive and easier to keep clean. Cattle also show signs of being refreshed after having a good bath — they eat better and rest better.

Use a good, lather-forming soap — a hard-water soap generally gives the best results. The animal should be thoroughly soaked with water, lathered well, and scrubbed — followed by a thorough rinsing to remove all the soap. If there are several animals to wash, you will save time by cutting the bars of soap into small pieces and putting them into a full bucket of water to soak for an hour or two before washing. Then the scrub brush may be simply dipped into the bucket and vigorously applied to the animal. Be careful not to squirt the water into the ears of the animal. The area between the udder and legs on the cows should be washed carefully, as this stains easily and will show if not clean.

This washing should be repeated every two weeks during the fitting period on the spotted and lighter-colored breeds. The Jersey people do not wash their cattle as often as others, if at all. They lather them with a suds of green soap and brush it out. However, during the past few years, some of the top showmen of the
Jersey breed also have been washing their cattle, especially during the warm weather.

The switches and tails that are white should be washed daily, and if stained, should be rinsed with water to which a small amount of blueing has been added. To wash a tail, dip it into a bucket of water, then rub thoroughly with a bar of the hard-water soap. Lather the switch by vigorously sudsing and rubbing the switch between the hands, and then rinse the soap out, and follow by a rinsing with the water containing blueing.

**Grooming**

Brushing and a good grooming should be done daily. This will remove the dead hair that is being shed and will stimulate the skin, all of which will help to produce a coat that fairly shines from good health. Of course, feeding the animal will be very important in this respect too, but all these factors work together in helping to make the animal most presentable. A good way to brush is to first go over the animal thoroughly with a rubber currycomb, which will loosen and pull out the dead hair. Then briskly go back over with quick, short strokes using a stiffer brush, such as a rice root brush. Then go over with a soft hairbrush and follow with a cloth. This will leave the coat clean, and in a short time it will glisten after each brushing. A steel currycomb need not be used except to remove dried-on dirt or manure, and then, only with care.

Proper grooming, feeding, and keeping the animal out of the hot sun for a long enough fitting period will practically insure a beautiful coat of hair on the animal.