

LIVESTOCK GRADING SERVICES IN VIRGINIA

**REPORT OF THE
COMMISSION ON LIVESTOCK GRADING
TO
THE GOVERNOR
AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



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COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Department of Purchases and Supply
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1961

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RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, September 11, 1961

To:

HONORABLE J. LINDSAY ALMOND, JR., *Governor of Virginia*

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA

At the 1960 Session, the General Assembly noted the importance of the livestock raising industry to the agricultural economy of the Commonwealth and expressed its concern as to whether livestock producers are obtaining optimum results from the services furnished by the Department of Agriculture and Immigration in connection with the grading of livestock. By Senate Joint Resolution No. 17 it created a Commission to make "a study and report upon the present methods and formulae used by those grading lambs, calves, and hogs, which will be sold for commercial purposes." The text of this resolution is as follows:

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 17

Creating a Commission to study the grading of certain live stock.

Whereas, the production and marketing of lambs, calves and hogs constitutes an important source of income in our agricultural economy; and

Whereas, recent changes in the prices, methods and formulae used by the authorities who grade such live stock have seriously and adversely affected the prices paid producers of lambs, calves, and hogs; and

Whereas, in order for the producers of such live stock to change their production method in order to take care of changes in grading practices, it is necessary that they be informed as to the standards employed in grading such live stock; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That a Commission composed of seven members is hereby created to make a study and report upon the present methods and formulae used by those grading lambs, calves, and hogs, which will be sold for commercial purposes. The Commission shall be composed of three members appointed from the membership of the House of Delegates by the Speaker thereof, two members of the Senate, appointed by the President thereof, and ex officio, the Commissioner of Agriculture and Immigration and the head of the Department of Animal Husbandry at Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

All agencies of the State shall assist the Commission in its work. The Commission shall hold such hearings and gather such evidence as it deems necessary to the attaining of its objectives. The Commission shall ascertain and set forth in its report those factors or other guides to which the graders of lambs, calves, and hogs give the greatest attention and which have the greatest effect upon the prices obtained by the producer. The Commission shall conclude its study and make its report on or before October one, nineteen hundred sixty, in order that producers of such live stock may avoid further losses. The members of the Commission shall receive no compensation for their services but shall be paid for their necessary expenses and for which and for such secretarial and other expenses as the Commission may incur which there is hereby appropriated the sum of \$2,000 to be paid from the Contingent Fund of the General Assembly.

Pursuant to this resolution, the President of the Senate appointed Harry C. Stuart, of Elk Garden, and John H. Temple, of Petersburg, as members of the Commission; the Speaker of the House of Delegates appointed Matt G. Anderson, of Oilville, Charles D. Price, of Stanley, and R. Maclin Smith, of Kenbridge, as members of the Commission. Parke C. Brinkley, Commissioner of Agriculture and Immigration and George W. Litton, Head of the Department of Animal Husbandry, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, served *ex officio* as members of the Commission.

The Commission organized by electing Senator Stuart as Chairman and Mr. Price as Vice-Chairman. John B. Boatwright, Jr., and Wildman S. Kincheloe, Jr., were appointed Secretary and Recording Secretary, respectively, to the Commission.

Desiring both to learn the attitude of livestock producers toward the livestock grading services now being performed by the Department of Agriculture and Immigration and to inform producers concerning the services available and methods and practices used by the Department in grading of livestock, the Commission initiated a series of conferences in the principal livestock-producing areas in the State. These were held under the auspices of the Department of Animal Husbandry of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Representatives of the Department of Agriculture and Immigration met with the producers and explained to them methods used in the grading of livestock and the basis upon which these services are made available. Twenty-five meetings were held in localities throughout the State selected to permit the attendance of producers in the major livestock-producing areas. The meetings were well attended. These meetings were of great benefit to the industry as well as giving the Commission insight into the views of the citizens most affected by the livestock grading program.

THE PRESENT GRADING PROGRAM

The Department of Agriculture and Immigration has been grading livestock on the hoof for producers since 1930, when 380 head of lambs were graded. This service has proved so beneficial to producers that it has been expanded until it has been grading 216,000 head of lambs, on the average, during the last four years, and, since the service was first offered, has graded almost 7,000,000 head of all types of livestock.

It is obvious that, since the service of highly trained persons is required to grade correctly, the service can be offered only where a sufficient number of animals are available to keep the cost below prohibitive levels. Grading is done only when requested by the auction market or at special

organized sales. During peak movement of lambs, about 32 markets and pools are simultaneously grading lambs; and in addition the grading of hogs and other livestock continues. Every effort must be made to see that the element of human judgment, necessarily involved, does not result in lack of uniformity in grading; constant supervision is required to assure this. In addition, checks are made to see that there is sufficient correlation between grading on the hoof and the grade which is established for the slaughtered carcasses. A recent check of 2500 graded hogs showed that 85% of them graded the same after slaughter as before.

The value of the grading service is amply demonstrated by available statistics. For the past four years, Virginia graded lambs have averaged \$1.17 a head more than those from the chief competing states—Kentucky, West Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee. When hog grading started at Smithfield about three years ago, prices in that market averaged \$1.00 to \$1.75 below western markets. Today Smithfield Number 1 hogs average 75¢ to \$1.25 above western markets.

Grading does not change the inherent value of an animal. What grading does is to differentiate between animals of different value by grouping those of the same grade together so that buyers will be attracted to bid more for the quality they want in a uniform lot of animals. This usually results in a higher price for higher quality animals. Ungraded livestock tend to sell at a blended price, with top quality animals bringing less than they should and low quality animals more than they should. The real contribution of grading is to offer a cash incentive to produce higher quality.

Official livestock grading has been a tremendous factor in building a national reputation for Virginia feeder calves and lambs and is now building a similar reputation for Virginia feeder pigs. Virginia has been in the top five states in the nation for four years in feeder calf prices and in 1957 was the highest of all the states. In the years 1956 through 1958 the average of all feeder calf prices in Virginia was from \$2.30 to \$4.10 above the national average. Of veal calves in Virginia, those graded officially by the Department in 1959 averaged \$7.70 per calf more than those sorted or graded unofficially by livestock markets. These results are being achieved at a total cost of 17.5¢ a head, of which the producer paid in fees an average of 12.15¢ a head.

LIVESTOCK GRADING STANDARDS

The resolution creating the Commission directed it, among other things, to "ascertain and set forth in its report those factors or other guides to which the graders of lambs, calves and hogs give the greatest attention and which have the greatest effect upon the prices obtained by the producer." We have indicated earlier in this report the effect which designation of livestock as being of a prime or good grade has upon the prices obtained on the sale of such livestock on the hoof.

It is clearly impossible to set forth in writing the elements of judgment which must enter into the grading of livestock. As is indicated in a bulletin of the United States Department of Agriculture (SRA-TMA 168) issued in April 1951 "The determination of the carcass grade that the slaughter animal will produce requires the exercising of well-regulated judgment. Each animal presents a different combination of the grade-determining factors. Animals frequently have characteristics associated with two or more grades. Therefore, a composite evaluation of all the inherent physical characteristics is essential for accuracy in determining

grade." The same bulletin, however, indicates the general factors which influence carcass excellence—conformation, finish, and quality. "Conformation refers to the general body proportions of the animal and to the ratio of meat to bone. Although primarily determined by the inherent muscular and skeletal system, it is also influenced by degree of fatness . . . Finish refers to the fatness of the animal. The type, quantity, and distribution of finish of the slaughter animal are very closely associated with the palatability and quality of the meat which it will produce . . . Quality . . . refers largely to the refinement of bone and to the smoothness and symmetry of the body. Quality is also closely associated with carcass yield and the proportion of meat to bone".

In the grading of lambs and calves, graders of the Department of Agriculture and Immigration follow standards established by the USDA. With reference to the grading of some hogs, the Department follows federal standards. As to others, it has established its own grade standards. In order to point out the factors which influence graders in their work, therefore, we set forth below the highest standard for each of the three types of livestock.

The resolution makes reference to a recent change in the USDA standards as to lambs and in this connection we quote from the Federal Register of March 4, 1960 (7 CFR Part 53) as to the effect of the changes in the standards then proposed, which later were adopted: "The conformation requirements would be relaxed by about one-half grade in each of these two grades for all age groups. The relaxation of the quality requirements, as evaluated primarily by consideration of external finish in relation to maturity, would vary in the different grades and age groups. The finish requirements would be relaxed by about one-half grade in both the Prime and Choice grades for very young lambs. For older lambs, requirements would be reduced about a full grade in Prime and about two-thirds of a grade in Choice. Quality requirements would be reduced about one-half grade for Prime and Choice grade yearlings and for Choice grade mature sheep. In addition, for all grades it would be prescribed that lambs and sheep which have a superior development of finish for a grade would not be eligible for that grade if their conformation was more than one full grade deficient for that grade."

The federal standard for the highest grade of lambs presently in effect is as follows: "Prime. (1) Lambs possessing the minimum requirements for the Prime grade are moderately lowest and blocky and thick-fleshed. They are moderately wide over the back, loin, and rump. Shoulders and hips are usually moderately smooth. The twist is moderately deep and full and the legs are moderately large and plump. They generally present a well-rounded appearance due to a slight fullness or plumpness over the crops, loin, and rump. Relatively young lambs, under seven months of age, tend to have a moderately thin fat covering over the back, ribs, loin, and rump. In handling, the backbone and ribs are readily discernible. Older, more mature lambs have a slightly thin fat covering over the back, ribs, loin, and rump. In handling, the backbone and ribs are slightly discernible. Prime lambs exhibit evidences of rather high quality. The bones tend to be proportionately small, the joints tend to be smooth, and the body tends to be trim, smooth, and symmetrical.

"(2) To qualify for the Prime grade, a lamb must possess the minimum qualifications for finish regardless of the extent that its conformation may exceed the minimum requirements for Prime. However, a development of finish which is superior to that specified as minimum for the Prime grade may compensate, on an equal basis, for a development

of conformation which is inferior to that specified for Prime as indicated in the following example: A lamb which has evidences of finish equivalent to the mid-point of the Prime grade may have conformation equivalent to the mid-point of the Choice grade and remain eligible for Prime. However, in no instance may a lamb be graded Prime which has a development of conformation inferior to that specified as minimum for the Choice grade."

The highest standard for calves appears in a USDA bulletin issued March 1951 (SRA-PMA 113) and is as follows:

"Calves possessing the minimum qualifications for Prime grade are superior in conformation, quality and finish. In conformation, Prime calves tend to be low-set, compact, and short of neck and body and thick-fleshed. They are wide over the back, loin, and rump. Shoulders and hips are neat and smoothly laid in. The twist is deep and full and the rounds are thick and moderately plump. There is a fullness or plumpness evident over the crops, loin, and rump which contributes to a well-rounded appearance. Prime calves have a slightly thick fat covering over the crops, back, loin, rump, and upper ribs. The brisket, rear flanks, and cod or udder show a marked fullness. Prime calves exhibit evidences of high quality. The bones tend to be proportionately small, joints smooth, the hide moderately thin and pliable, and the body very trim, smooth, and symmetrical."

The situation with regard to the grading of hogs is a little more complicated since the classifications are more varied. Standards are set forth for barrows and gilts and for slaughter sows in a USDA bulletin issued April 1958 (SRA-AMS172). The grade for No. 1 slaughter barrows and gilts which is typical, is set forth below:

"Slaughter barrows and gilts in this grade have an intermediate degree of finish. Hogs of the minimum finish for U. S. No. 1 are moderately wide over the top, and width of body over the top appears nearly equal to that at the underline. The back, from side to side, is moderately full and thick and usually appears well-rounded and blends smoothly into the sides. Width through the hams is usually nearly equal to width through the shoulders. The sides are moderately long, slightly thick, and usually smooth; the flanks are slightly thick and full. Depth at the rear flank may be slightly less than depth at the fore flank. Hams tend to be moderately thick and full with a slightly thick covering of fat. Jowls are moderately full and thick but are usually trim. Barrows and gilts in this grade produce U. S. No. 1 carcasses. Barrows and gilts with apparent degree of finish typical of the fatter one-half of the U. S. No. 1 grade but with the evidences of meatiness, firmness of fleshing, and distribution of finish more nearly typical of the U. S. No. 2 grade shall be graded U. S. No. 2."

In addition the State Department of Agriculture and Immigration has adopted tentative grade standards for feeder pigs. The standard for the No. 1 grade is as follows:

VIRGINIA NUMBER I FEEDER PIGS

"Number I feeder grade pigs closely approach the ideal in conformation, finish and quality. They are relatively large for their age, have the general appearance of exceptional thrift and vitality, and show ability to reach market weight rapidly. They have exceptional muscling and show proportionate length and depth throughout. The arch of these pigs shows uniformity, natural muscling and strength with a high tail setting. Hams are thick, full, deep and indicate that they are well muscled. They are

uniform in width from end to end with the shoulders blending neatly and smoothly into the sides. Pigs in this grade indicate in their general appearance a ruggedly refined type relatively free of objectional swirls, dullness of hair, and coarseness. They stand on adequate bone with sound feet and legs showing proper balance. Pigs of this grade should produce a high percentage of U. S. Number I slaughter hogs and a U. S. Number I carcass when slaughtered from 180 pounds to 220 pounds."

It should be emphasized that the standards set forth above are the minimum standards for the grade indicated as to the particular kind of livestock. A person grading livestock may be definitely certain as to one animal which he grades on the hoof that, upon slaughter, it will be in the same grade in which he has classified it. However, another animal may be superior in one respect and slightly deficient in another and may, upon slaughter, fall into a grade below. For this reason, the training and experience of the graders and the reputation which has been built up by the Virginia Department over a period of years are most important to those selling livestock, since it is in the last analysis the judgment of the individual and the buyers' reliance upon it which determines the price of the animal.

CONCLUSION

It thus appears that the federal agency in charge of grading has recently changed its classifications and that the State Department of Agriculture and Immigration is engaged upon a grading program designed to increase the income of farmers engaged in the production of livestock and swine. We believe that Virginia Polytechnic Institute and the Department of Agriculture and Immigration are doing an excellent job to advise farmers about grading practices to the end that producers may raise animals which can be classified as the highest grade, thereby bringing in additional income.

It is our recommendation, therefore, that the State Department of Agriculture and Immigration and the Virginia Polytechnic Institute increase their efforts to keep farmers advised of the standards which animals must meet to be put in the highest grade; it is also important that any changes in the standards or grades be brought at once to the attention of the farmers so that they can adjust their plans accordingly.

Respectfully submitted,

HARRY C. STUART, Chairman
CHARLES D. PRICE, Vice-Chairman
MATT G. ANDERSON
PARKE C. BRINKLEY
GEORGE W. LITTON
R. MACLIN SMITH
JOHN H. TEMPLE

