



## What is Conformation?

Conformation is the body structure, form, and overall physical appearance of a Dexter.

## Why should I care about the conformation of my Dexters?

The strengths and weaknesses of a Dexter's conformation impacts the animal's functionality, longevity, fertility, and production efficiency. Taking a look at key traits of your animals is an important component in formulating a plan for building your breeding herd. This type of evaluation is helpful in making decisions about which animals you want to buy, which animals you want to keep in your current herd, which animals have nothing more to add to your breeding goals, and which animals should be culled due to very undesirable qualities.

## How can I begin to learn about the conformation of my Dexters?

This document has several sections that can help you compare your Dexters to a desired type and conformation:

- **Dexter Breed Characteristics**  
⇒ Use this section to see if your Dexter fits the general breed description of a Dexter cow or bull.
- **Examples of Breed Types**  
⇒ Use this section to compare your Dexter to photos of typical Dexter breed types.
- **Conformation Guide**  
⇒ Use this section to look at specific traits in your Dexters and compare them to the desired ideal range. The guide is derived from the ADCA's original Linear Classification Tool. With a basic knowledge of cattle anatomy and an ability to examine cattle in an unbiased manner, this guide can be a valuable tool for ADCA members.



Sincere appreciation to the 2007 ADCA Classification Committee (Patti Adams, Tom Gray, Dick Clark, Bruce Barbour, Jeff Chambers, and Dan Butterfield) for their time, insights, and knowledge in preparing the document *Linear Descriptive/Type Traits For Classification Of Dexter Cattle* upon which this document *Dexter Conformation Assessment* is founded.

## Dexter Breed Characteristics

### General:

- Color:** Solid black, solid red, or solid dun are of equal merit. A small amount of white on the reproductive organs, udder and/or underline is permissible. A few white hairs in the tassel (switch) of the tail are also permissible.
- Type:** The Dexter is a dual-purpose breed with both beef and dairy qualities.
- Head & Horns:** Short, broad head, tapering gracefully towards a broad muzzle. Jaw should be wide enough to accommodate well-placed teeth with an even bite. Eyes should be bright and prominent. Horns should be moderately thick with an inward, upward curve. Removal of horns is allowed without penalty. Polled animals are also allowed.
- Neck:** Deep and thick, but not too short, blending well into the shoulders. Head should be carried above the spine.
- Body:** Ample chest width giving plenty of room for the heart and lungs; well sprung ribs, wide across the loins. Quarters thick and deep, broad full hips, well- rounded rump. Straight topline with tail set level with spine. Good width between both front and back legs. Legs should be of moderate length, in proportion to body size, squarely placed under the body, wide apart and perpendicular when viewed from the rear. Feet should be short-toed, deep heeled and level soled. They should not turn either outwards or inwards.
- Skin:** Loose and pliable. Hair should be short and sleek in summer, longer and thicker in winter.

### Cows:

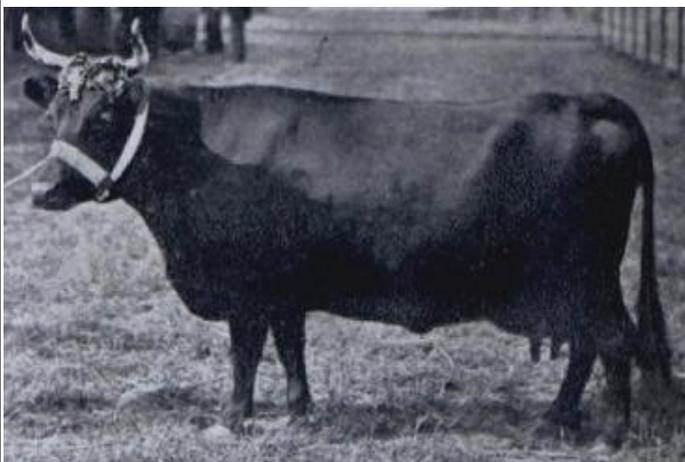
Udder should be well attached with high and wide rear attachment and strong median suspensory ligament. The four teats should be of medium size and well spaced on the udder, hanging plumb and of equal length. All four quarters should be of equal size. Typical range in height is between 34 inches and 46 inches, with a recommended range of 36-42 inches.

### Bulls:

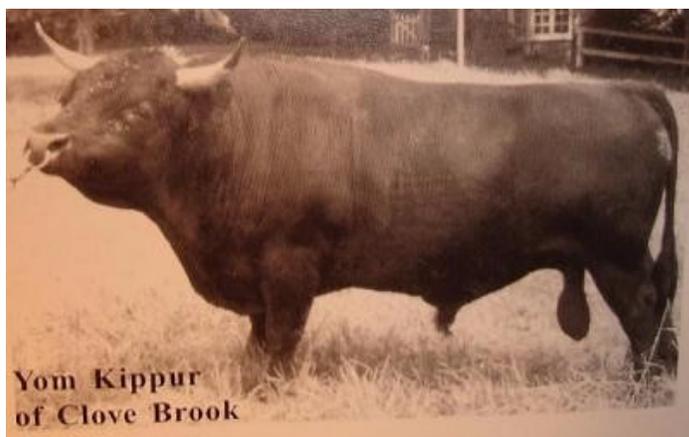
Well hung testicles of even size. Four well defined teats evenly spaced. Bull's sheath should be of moderate size and held near the body. The penis should retract completely into the sheath when at rest. Typical range in height is between 36 inches and 50 inches, with a recommended range of 38-44 inches.

### Examples of Dexter Breed Types Heterozygous Carriers of Chondrodysplasia

Cows



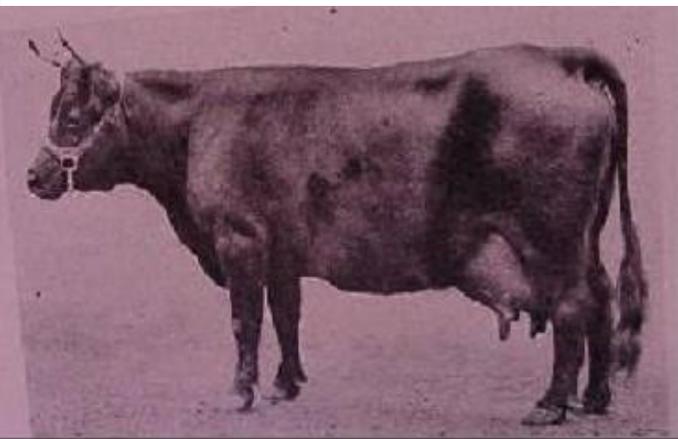
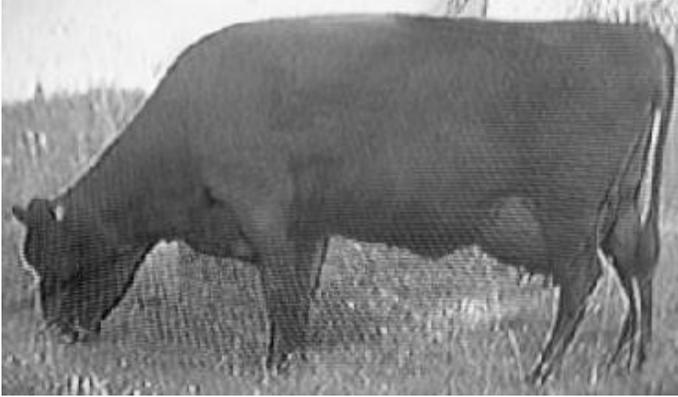
Bulls



## Examples of Dexter Breed Types Non-Carriers of Chondrodysplasia

**Cows**

**Bulls**



## Conformation Guide

### Using this guide:

This guide is provided to help breeders evaluate the conformation of their Dexters. It is divided into 4 main sections, each having several sub-sections. Dexter conformation will fit somewhere on a range from one extreme to another extreme. The photos provided on this guide show the possible conformation range at three points:

- Lower extreme of the range
- Mid-range
- Upper extreme of the range

The ideal conformation for a specific characteristic is indicated on each set of drawings. Using these diagrams and descriptions as a comparison to their Dexters, breeders can get an idea of where their animal fits on that range.

### Age of Animal:

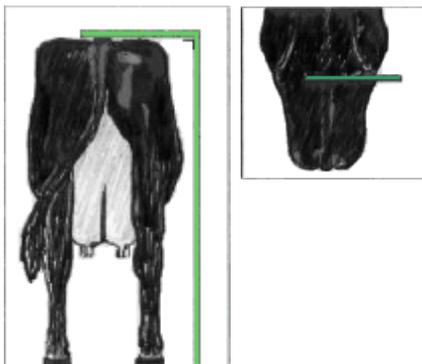
The minimum age for evaluating a Dexter is 2 years old for either Bull or Cow. Cows must have had at least one calf and should be evaluated while they are in milk to properly view their udder conformation.

### Sections:

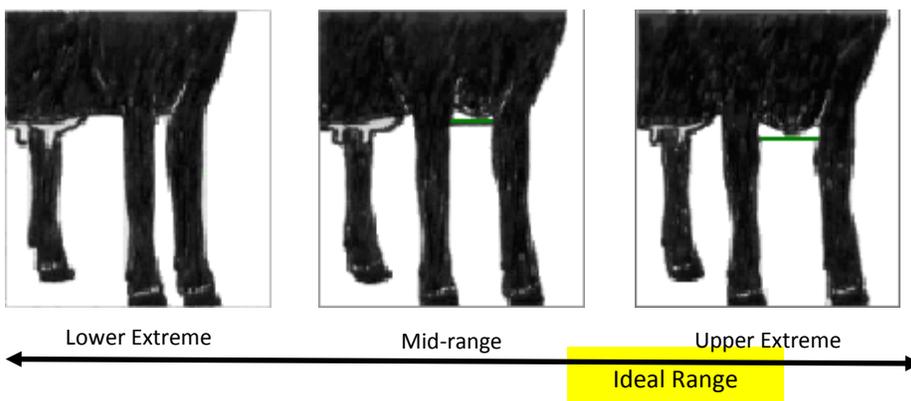
- **Form and Substance** - Both cows and bulls. Considered to be 50% of the overall conformation.
  1. Stature
  2. Chest Width
  3. Body Depth
  4. Ribs and Bone
  5. Rump Angle
  6. Rump Width
  7. Body Length
  8. Topline and Tail Set
  9. Muscling
  10. Style/Balance
    - Proportion
    - Breed Character
    - Masculinity/Femininity
    - Presence
    - Temperament
- **Mobility** - Both cows and bulls. Considered to be 25% of the overall conformation.
  1. Front Legs
  2. Front Foot Angle - Side View
  3. Rear Legs & Foot Angle
    - Leg Side View
    - Rear Foot Angle
  4. Rear Legs - Rear View
  5. Movement/Tracking
- **Female Mammary System** - Cow only. Considered to be 25% of the overall conformation.
  1. Fore Udder Attachment
  2. Rear Udder Height
  3. Rear Udder Cleft
  4. Udder Depth
  5. Teat Placement
  6. Teat Length
- **Bull Reproductive System** - Bull only. Considered to be 25% of the overall conformation.
  1. Scrotum and Testicles
  2. Sheath
  3. Penis

## Conformation Guide: Form and Substance

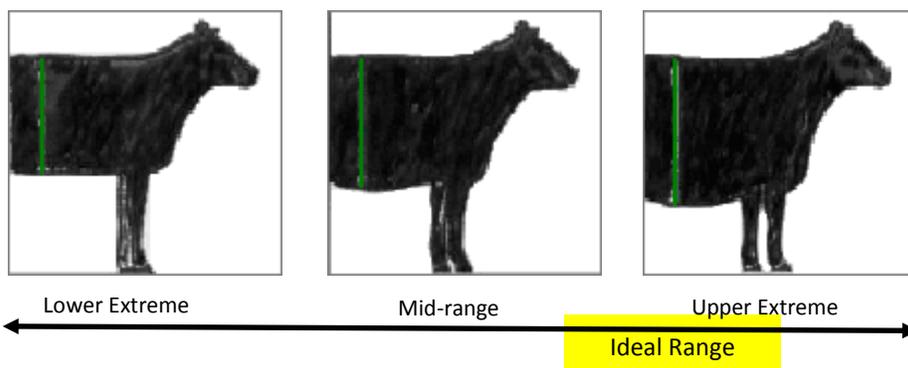
1. **Stature** - Measured as height in inches at the hips while the animal is standing on a hard, flat surface in a natural position.  
⇒ Ideal cow height and bull heights are measured at 3 years of age. See ADCA guidelines.



2. **Chest Width** - Measured from the inside surface between the top of the front legs.  
⇒ Range: from very narrow to exceptionally wide



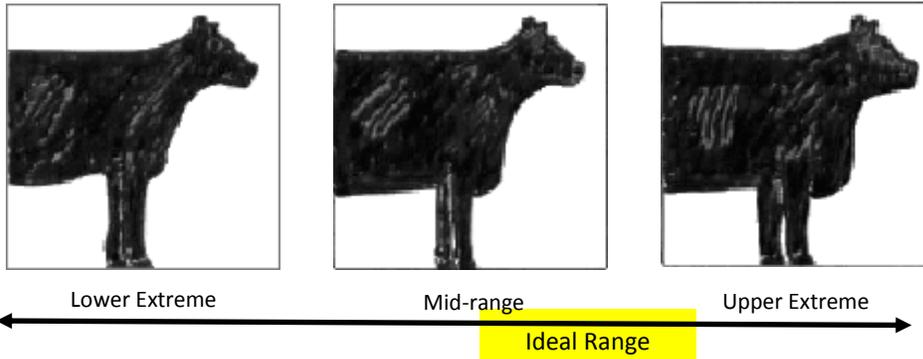
3. **Body Depth** - A measure of overall depth, primarily at the rib cage in the animal's midsection.  
⇒ Range: from very shallow bodied to extremely deep bodied



## Conformation Guide: Form and Substance

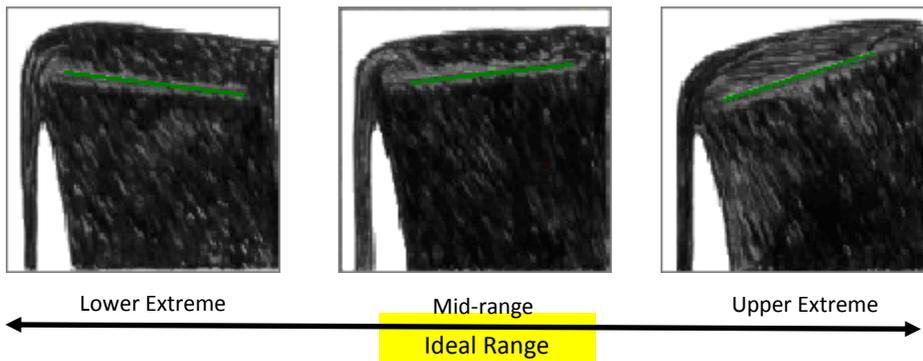
4. **Ribs and Bone** - Ribs should be well sprung and widely spaced, providing width across the loins and ample capacity to accommodate the vital organs. The term "bone" means bones and tendons as indicated by total circumference of the legs. The bone should be adequate to provide structural support for the animal's body, but not be excessively heavy or massive.

⇒ Range: from fine and fragile to excessively heavy or massive



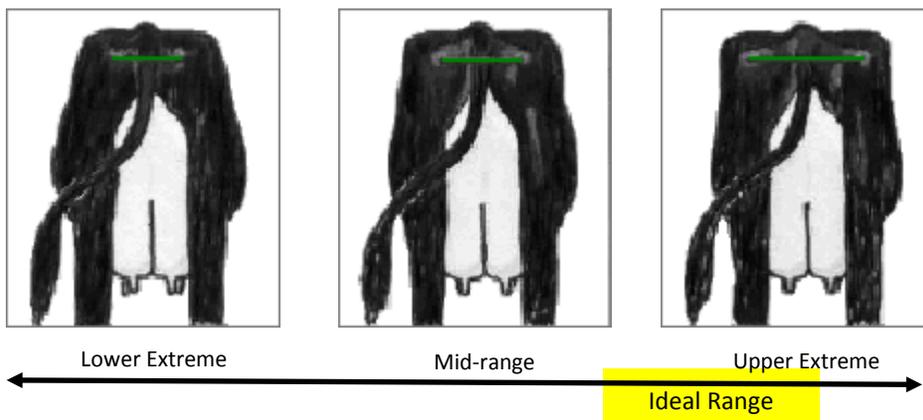
5. **Rump Angle (Side View)** - Measures the degree of slope from hooks to pins. Proper rump angle is associated with calving ease and decreased incidence of postpartum infection. Preferred rump angle is a slight drop from hooks to pins.

⇒ Range: from strong upward slope to strong downward slope

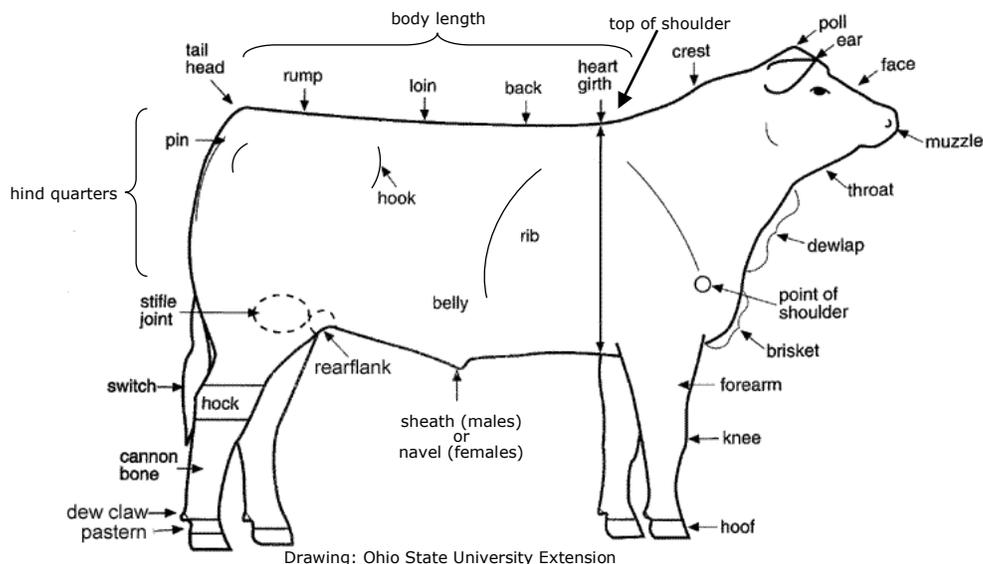


6. **Rump Width** - Measures the width of the hip and pelvic area.

⇒ Ranges from extremely narrow to extremely wide



## Conformation Guide: Form and Substance

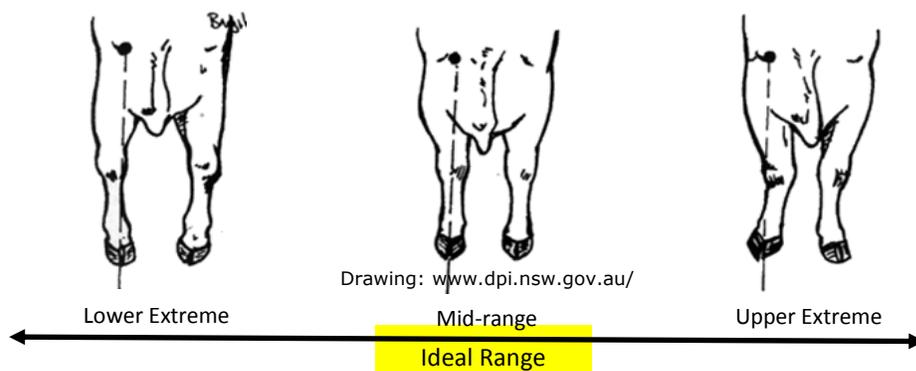


7. **Body Length** - Adequate length of body is necessary for proper proportion. Important beef carcass traits are associated with length and size of loin, rib, and flank. However, a body that is too long will tend to be weak in the back.
  - ⇒ Range: from close-coupled to excessively long-bodied.
  - ⇒ The ideal body length stretches from the top of the shoulder to the tail head (no dips, sways, or breaks,) with a balanced overall appearance.
8. **Topline and Tail Set** - The topline is evaluated by looking at the animal from the side, scanning from the top of the shoulder to the tail head.
  - ⇒ Range: from sway back to roach back
  - ⇒ The ideal topline is straight with the tail-head set in a level line with the spine.
9. **Muscling**: Measured by examination of the loin and hindquarters. Loin should be thick and wide when viewed from above; hindquarters should be deep and rounded.
  - ⇒ Ranges from narrow, shallow, light muscling to extremely heavy muscling
10. **Style/Balance**: Judged on the overall appearance and behavior of the animal and includes these things:
  - ⇒ Overall proportion
  - ⇒ Breed character
  - ⇒ Masculinity/femininity
  - ⇒ Presence
  - ⇒ Temperament
  - ⇒ Range: from atypical animal to outstanding representative of the breed

## Conformation Guide: Mobility

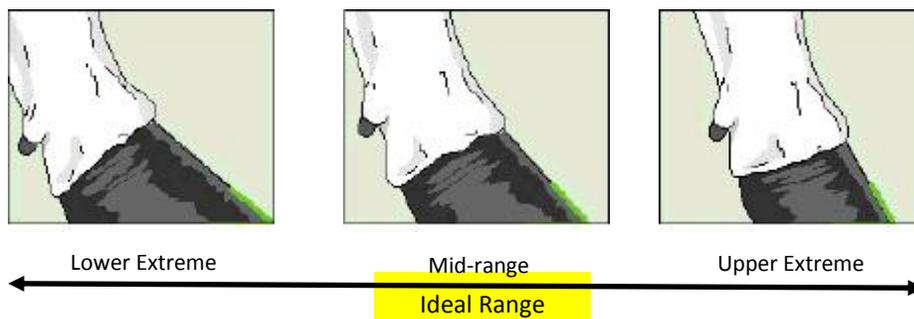
1. **Front Legs – Front View** - Measures the extent to which the front legs and hooves, when viewed from the front, deviate from being straight and parallel to each other.

⇒ Range: from extremely toed-in to extremely toed-out



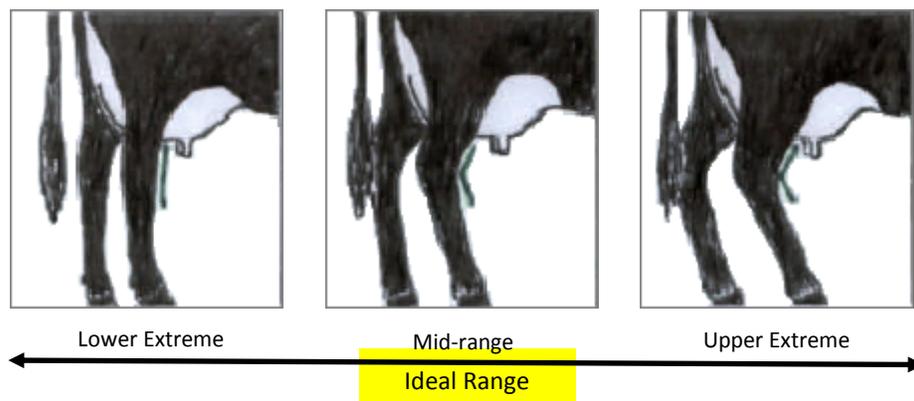
2. **Front Foot Angle – Side View** - Measures foot angle on the first inch from the hairline. A foot with an intermediate to steep angle (45° or greater) is preferred.

⇒ Range from extremely flat to extremely steep



3. **Rear Legs & Foot Angle – Side View** - Examines rear leg set, including hock, pastern, and hoof set and angles.

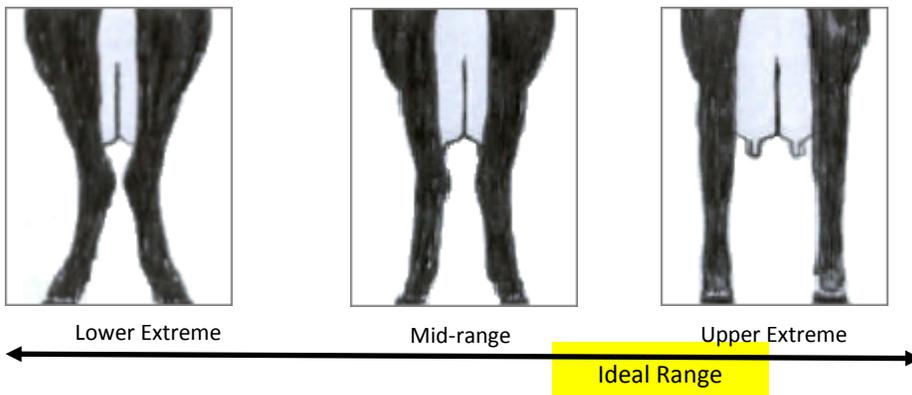
⇒ Range: from extremely posty to extremely sickle hocked



## Conformation Guide: Mobility

4. **Rear Legs – Rear View** - Measures the extent to which the rear legs, when viewed from the rear, deviate from being parallel to each other.

⇒ Range: from severe hocking to slight hocking out



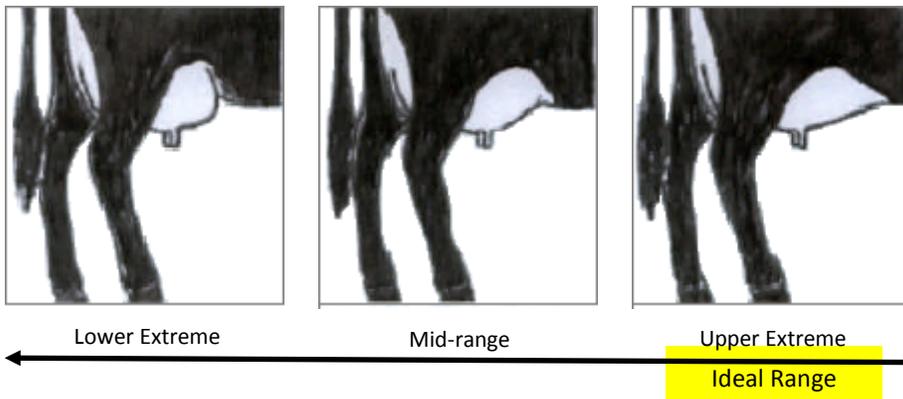
5. **Movement/Tracking** - Examines how an animal tracks as it walks. Smooth movement is preferred with the rear hooves tracking exactly in-line with front hooves in a graceful, regular motion.

⇒ Range: from rough, choppy, irregular movement to very smooth, in-line movement

## Conformation Guide: Cow Mammary System

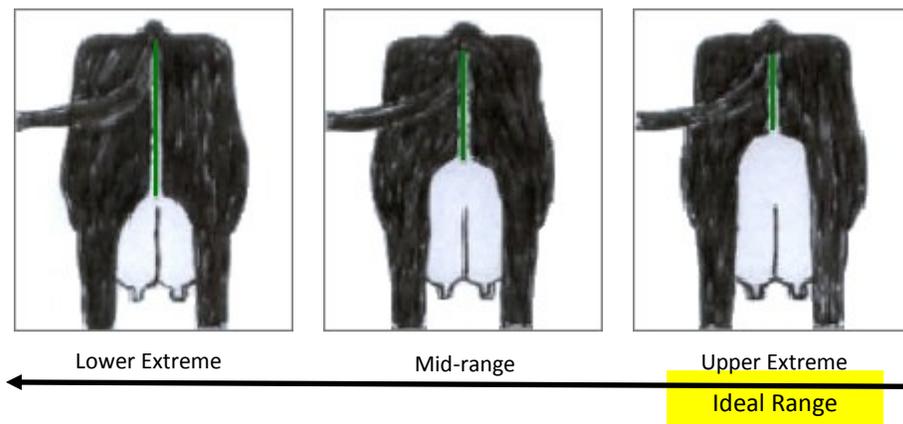
1. **Fore Udder Attachment** - Examines the strength and snugness of attachment of the fore udder to the body wall. No adjustment is made for stage of lactation.

⇒ Range: from extremely loose to extremely snug and strong



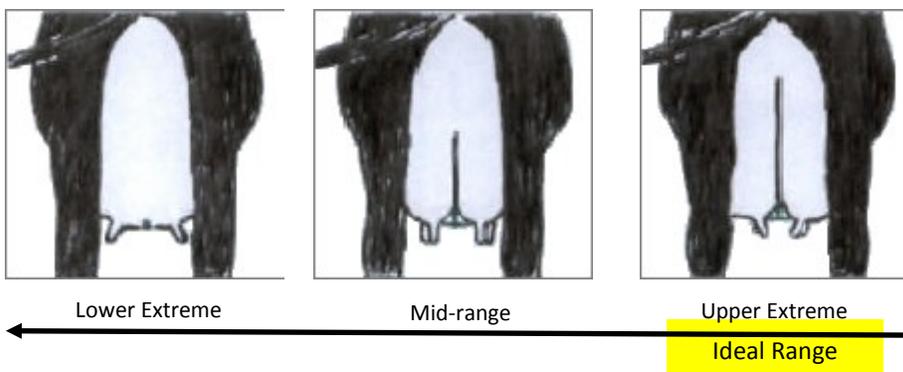
2. **Rear Udder Height** - Examines the distance between the bottom of the vulva and the top of the udder. No adjustment is made for stage of lactation.

⇒ Range: from very low to very high



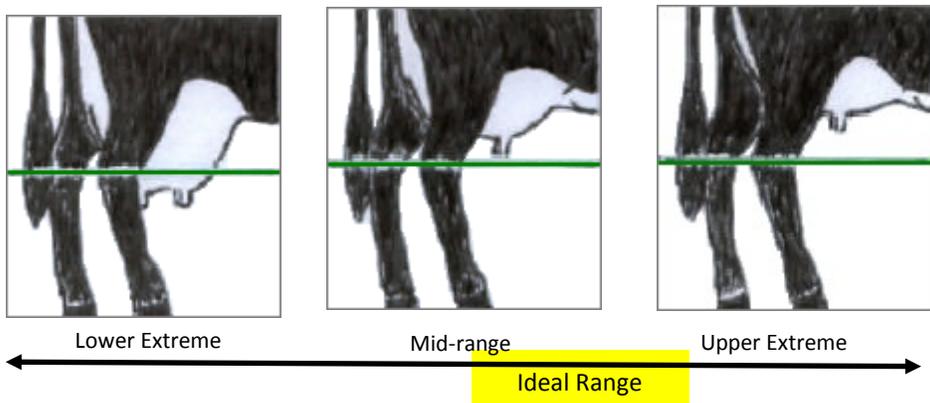
3. **Rear Udder Cleft** - Examines the depth of the cleft as an indicator of the strength and integrity of the central ligament from the base of the rear udder.

⇒ Range: from convex (no cleft) to deep definition cleft. Dry cows are not examined for this trait.

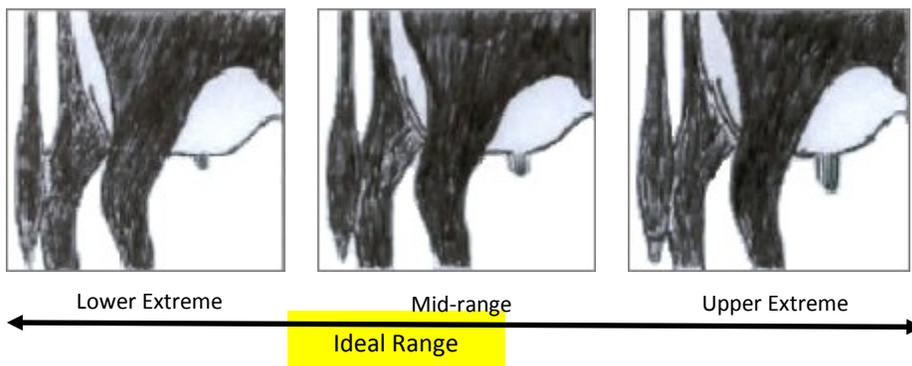


## Conformation Guide: Cow Mammary System

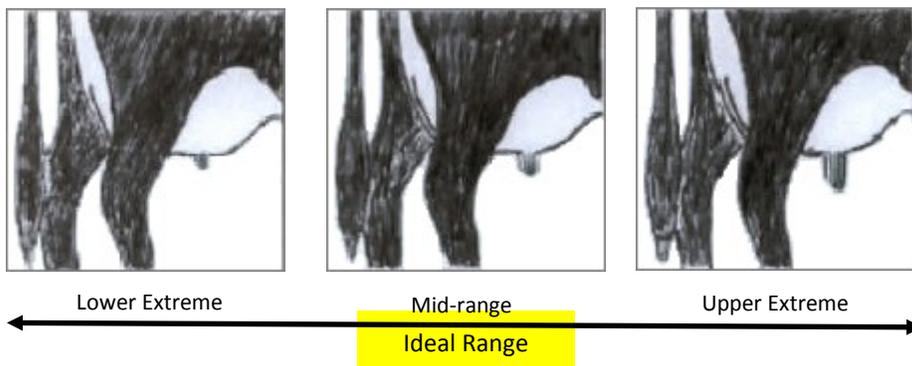
4. **Udder Depth** - The distance from the lowest part of the udder floor to the hock.  
 ⇒ Range: from very deep/well below hocks to extremely shallow/well above hocks. Dry cows are not examined for this trait.



5. **Teat Placement – Rear View** - Examines the placement of the front and rear teats relative to the center of each quarter. No adjustment is made for stage of lactation.  
 ⇒ Range: from extreme outside of quarters to extreme inside of quarters

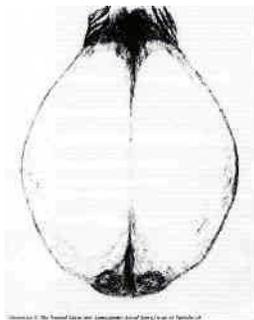


6. **Teat Length** - Reference length of 2¼-inches at the middle of the ideal range. No adjustment is made for stage of lactation.  
 ⇒ Range: from less than ¾-inch to greater than 3¾-inch



## Conformation Guide: Bull Reproductive System

1. **Scrotum and Testicles** - Testicular size is measured as scrotal circumference. Shape and size of scrotum are indications of a bull's fertility. Exact scrotal circumference can be measured during a breeding soundness exam (BSE) done by a veterinarian prior to the breeding season. Bulls must have two testicles descended into the scrotum in order to be considered for classification. Scrotal shape is also very important since the bull must be able to raise and lower the testicles for proper temperature control. Testicles should hang down well away from the body. There should be an obvious neck at the top of the scrotum, with the two testicles hanging down large and of equal-size, giving an overall pear shape to the scrotum.
  - ⇒ Range: from straight-sided or undersized scrotum to tapered or excessively large scrotum



Drawing: Gerald Fry

2. **Sheath** - The sheath should be of moderate size, held near the body, but not overly tight or restrictive.
  - ⇒ Range: from loose, distended sheath to overly tight, restrictive sheath



Desirable sheath

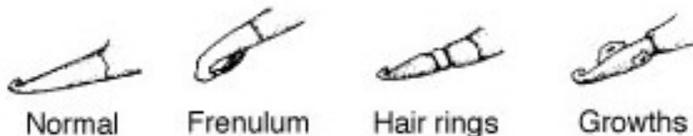
Loose, undesirable sheath

Drawing: <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/>

3. **Penis** - The bull should retract the penis completely into the sheath while at rest. An inadequately retracted penis is subject to injury and infection. Bulls with penile deviations such as S curve, corkscrew, or rainbow (bent in a semicircle) are highly undesirable as herd sires.
  - ⇒ Range: from poorly retracted penis to completely retracted penis

### Impairments of Penis

Drawing: <http://extension.missouri.edu/>



Normal

Frenulum

Hair rings

Growths