

## Perspectives on Judging Pork Loins

Perspectives based on how I was trained and what I currently see in the pork industry today:

Just like the industry, everything is value-driven; thus, all judging classes should be placed on value.

Currently, the pork industry seems to be at a crossroads...are we high lean or high quality product? In general, most pork indices value yield/cutability greater than high quality (color, marbling, pH) product as most high quality product is generally significantly lower yielding.

- Thus, for pork loins, value is driven off of yield/cutability, resulting in the greatest amount of retail/salable product. Obviously, that makes the combination of trimness and muscling the most important factors.
  
- Still, Quality is important and needs to be considered:
  1. Pale, Soft, Exudative (PSE) pork is much less valuable. From my judging training, the first thing taught in pork loin judging was that PSE pork should be placed last as PSE is unacceptable quality (and it is) – from an industry perspective, the prevalence in PSE pork has been greatly reduced in the last 10-20 years, but any PSE product is devalued and graded out of pork loin production.
  2. Two-tone colored product is very undesirable for both retailers and consumers. Retailers will issue claims on two-toned product because they know consumers will not purchase it due to undesirable appearance.
  3. Premium programs exist based on product quality. Most packers sort loins based on some combination of color, marbling, and pH to meet higher standards of premium programs and generate more value.
  4. Product for export markets. Some (not all) export markets, say Japan for example, demand a higher quality product, maybe something that is a color score and marbling score 3 or greater.
  
- With all that said, when I look at a pork loin class (and I've put 2 together the last 2 years that the middle pair was placed on quality), I don't think that the highest quality loin (color, marbling) should always win, unless it is the highest cutability. For me, I think Quality comes into play in close pairs...if there is a pair where two loins are close in terms of Cutability, Quality should be a larger factor in how that pair is placed, but there needs to be a noticeable difference (maybe one is very two-toned in color and devoid in marbling versus the other loin that has a very uniform, reddish pink color and much greater amount of marbling). In that case, these are some potential quality statements to lead off with in the opening statement of the pair:
  1. In a close pair, I placed 1 over 2 as 1 was a higher quality loin that would be better suited for export trade.
  2. In a close pair, 3 placed over 4 as 3 was a higher quality loin that would have a higher consumer appeal.

3. In placing a close pair of high cutability loins 2 over 3, 2 was a higher quality loin that would be more suitable for a premium pork program.
- In those instances where the highest quality loin is also the fattest, lowest yielding loin, it should go last, but there needs to be some great discussion in grant backs and acknowledgements in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> paragraphs. Specifically, if there truly is a large difference in quality in the bottom pair, a grant back should include a quality statement:
    1. I grant 2 was a higher quality loin that would have a higher consumer appeal.
  - Unfortunately, every class is different and I don't think there is a hard and fast line at how every class needs to be placed – that's also why there are multiple members on a committee putting officials together – everyone has their own perspectives. But, this is judging and to excel, one needs to be great at weighing differences, so it is very important to take a step back and look at the big picture.