

Judging Criteria for Crops at County Fairs

Corn Stalk/Sheath Bundle

If corn from this year's crop is to be exhibited, it can be shown in sheaves because it is not yet ripe. Bundles should include 3-6 stalks, depending upon the fair catalogue.

Use these criteria when judging:

- *Leaves, Stalks, and Color:* Leaves should be free of damage from pests and weather. Stalks should have good color, and be uniform in size and height.
- *Ear Development:* The ears should be of uniform maturity. Look for ears with well-filled, straight, regular rows of yellow, dented kernels. The ears should have good tip and butt development. There should be no insect, disease, weather, or other indication of damage on the kernels or the cob. Count number of ears per stalk.
- *Preparation of Sheaf:* Stalks should be tied together loosely in three places in an attractive arrangement. The roots are either to be removed or cleaned, depending upon the fair

Ear Corn

Entries generally require 5-10 ears of corn wired together. Sometimes a lot number calls for the "best single ear of corn" and will only have 1 ear.

Use these criteria when judging:

- *Maturity:* When corn is to be exhibited as an ear sample, ears should be mature (dry). Kernels should be bright and plump. When kernels are loose and flexible on the cob, the ear probably was immature at harvest.
- *Condition:* Ears should be in good condition. Look for ears with well-filled, straight, regular rows of kernels. The ears should have good tip and butt development. There should be no insect, disease, weather, or other damage on the kernels or cob.
- *Uniformity:* Ears should be as much alike as possible in size, shape, color, and kernel type. The butt, middle, and tip of the ear should all have about the same diameter.

Shelled Corn

Depending upon the fair, the entry may require 4-8 quarts (a peck), or a quart jar of shelled corn from the past year's crop. Use these criteria when judging:

- *Maturity:* Kernels should be dry and fully mature.
- *Condition:* Shelled corn kernels should be bright, plump, and free from damage, mold, and rot. Samples should be free of foreign material.
- *Uniformity:* Shelled corn samples should be uniform in color and size.

Corn Silage

Corn silage must be fermented in a silo and come from the last year's crop. Some county fairs require that corn silage samples be exhibited in a five-quart ice cream pail or similar container with cover on. Other fairs require a clear plastic bag that is tied tightly to exclude air and retard the fermentation process. Exhibits generally consist of 8-10 pounds of silage that represent the corn crop. Exhibitors are often asked to include a statement about hybrid maturity, date planted, population, and date cut.

Use these criteria when judging:

- *Preservation:* Corn silage should have a natural color. It should also have a very mild, clean, slightly sharp odor and taste, which indicates the correct amount of acidity for proper preservation. Silage should not have a musty, moldy, or burned odor. High moisture silages are usually the ones with strong odors. If a sample feels slimy or moisture is left in your hand when you squeeze it, the silage has too much moisture.
- *Crop Quality:* Look for corn silage with a high grain content, which makes it a superior livestock feed.

Threshed Small Grains

Grain is to come from the most recent harvest and dry for proper storage. For threshed small grain exhibits, most fairs specify a 1-2 quart jar, ½ peck, or 2-4 pound sample of seed. Check the premium list for the size of the sample required. Exhibitors may be asked to include a statement about the variety, number of acres raised, and yield per acre. Examples of small grain exhibits include **Soybeans, Wheat, Barley, Oats, Rye, Buckwheat, and Sunflower.**

Use these criteria when judging:

- *Condition:* Ideal samples are clean with uniform, plump kernels of good color and free of musty odors. There should be no sign of mechanical or insect damage, mold, or rot. There should be no small, shriveled, cracked, broken, diseased, dull, or off-color kernels. (The entry can be cleaned with a screen and then hand cleaned by exhibitor to remove impurities.)
- *Single Seed Variety:* The sample should have a single, pure variety of seed.
- *Free of Weed Seeds:* Sample should be free of weed seeds and any foreign or inert objectionable materials.

Soybean Stalks Group III, IV, V & VI

The group numbers refer to the number of days the plants grow vegetatively until flowering begins. As you move up in maturity groups the plants have a bigger 'factory' (leaves= energy) for production of seed, which should maximize yield. Each move up in maturity group adds about 10 more days to the growing cycle. Therefore, a group V or VI (*early beans-planted earlier in the season*) need more days to grow before flowering than a group III or IV (*late beans-planted later in the season*). So, group V and VI should naturally have many more pods than those in group III and IV. That is why they are usually separated into separate judging

categories. We are grading these plants on how they would stand up to each other as far as yield is concerned.

Use these criteria when judging:

- *Number of seed pods present.* More pods= higher yield.
- *Pod Fill.* Each pod should be plump and all seeds should be developed inside that pod.
- *Number of seed per pod.* More seed per pod= higher yield.
- *Quality.* Disease and insect damage free. Pods should be in pristine condition.
- *Appearance.* This can be deceiving. Soybeans must dry down before they are harvested. So, dryness and browning of entry will not have a negative impact. Early beans in groups V & VI will likely be more dried than late beans in groups III & IV because they have been growing for a longer period of time.
- *Easiest to judge if all leaves are removed.* This should be specified in the fair entry catalogue.

Sunflower Heads

Judging sunflower is not based on beauty of the bloom as it is in horticulture categories. It is based upon potential yield of the crop and overall quality.

Use these criteria when judging:

- *Head Size-* number of seed present effects potential yield
- *Maturity-* sunflower seeds mature from the outside of the head to the inside. Look for heads whose seeds are fully developed (not green).
- *Consistency-* If more than 1 head is submitted compare them for consistency among the entry including stem trimming, overall size, and maturity.
- *Quality-* heads are full and not missing seed throughout the head
- *Appearance-* Entries should not have yellow petals, which indicates immature seed. Petals should be brown & withered or absent.

Cotton

The judging of cotton is based on the potential of the entry's crop as a whole to produce quality yield. In this case, we are considering pounds of cotton and fiber quality. Entry Rules will specify whether the boll should be open or closed and whether it should be presented on the stalk or bolls only. If entry is on the stalk, the leaves should be removed in most cases and will likely be 3 stalks that have been de-leafed & wired together for a single entry.

Use these criteria when judging:

- *Number & size of bolls.* Increased number of bolls and larger size= higher yield
- *Lint Color.* Lint should be a clean bright white.
- *Lint Removal.* Comes out of the boll easily with little left behind.

- *Boll appearance.* For entries that have closed bolls, they should be free of blemishes from pest and disease. A purple coloration and small spots is normal.