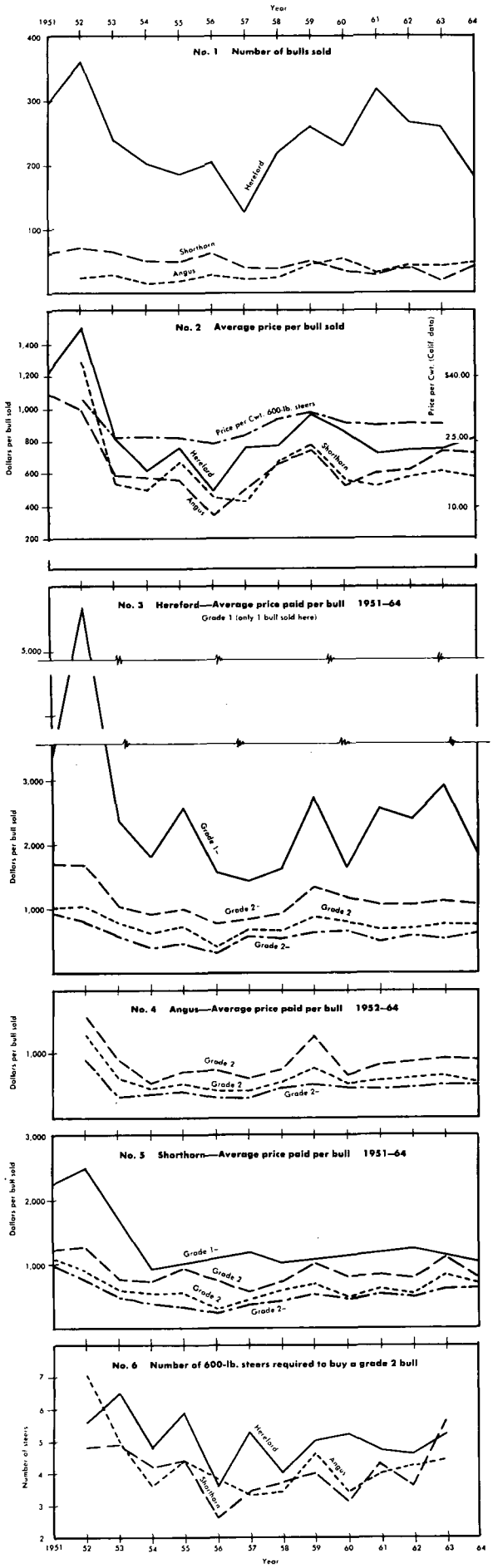


RED BLUFF BULL SALE

—an analysis of the 14-year history of the country's largest graded range bull sale

REUBEN ALBAUGH • DOYLE REED

RED BLUFF BULL SALE—SUMMARY OF BULLS SOLD BY GRADE, 1951 TO 1964

		Number consigned	Per cent by grade	Average price	Difference	Average grade*
Hereford						
Grade	1	1		$6,000	$3,588	
	1–	84	2.3	2,412	1,244	
	2+	629	16.9	1,168	330	
	2	1768	47.3	838		
	2–	860	23.1	578		
	Sifted	387	10.4			86.9
	Total	3729	100.0	870		
Angus						
Grade	1–	3	.6	1,308	531	
	2+	57	10.6	777	124	
	2	206	38.2	653	179	
	2–	142	26.4	474		
	Sifted	131	24.2			86.4
	Total	539	100.0	612		
Shorthorn						
Grade	1–	20	2.7	1,258	372	
	2+	116	15.9	886	263	
	2	323	44.3	623	83	
	2–	182	25.0	547		
	Sifted	88	12.1			86.9
	Total	729	100.0	667		

* Based on the following scores

Grade 1 = 96
1– = 93
2+ = 90
2 = 87
2– + 84

THE NOW-FAMOUS Red Bluff Bull Sale was organized by a group of progressive cattlemen and their livestock farm advisor, Don Smith, in 1942. The basic purpose was to upgrade the beef cattle in Tehama County through a marketing and production improvement project. Within a few years the sale gained attention throughout the West, and purebred breeders from eight states are now among the consignors each year. Bulls sold at Red Bluff are purchased by buyers from several of the western states, as well as California cattlemen. At first only Hereford bulls were sold, but by 1950 Angus and Shorthorns were included and it is now called a three-breed sale.

To improve the quality of cattle consigned at this annual marketing event, the sales committee inaugurated a grading and sifting procedure. The sifting committee consisted of commercial cattlemen and a veterinarian whose assignment was to sort out all unsound cattle. The grading committee then assigned a University of California grading number to each bull. This grading system attempts to measure all beef cattle with the same yardstick. It differs from ordinary judging in that it classifies an animal not only in relation to the individuals in the group but also in relation to the beef cattle population as a whole.

Weight for age, as well as conformation, is considered when grading beef animals. Bulls grading high should be large, rugged for their age, yet displaying plenty of quality and smoothness. They should be thick from front to rear, moderately deep, standing on straight legs and feet, and carrying ample bone. Plenty of length is necessary from the hook to the pin bone. Wide loins are desirable.

Only cattle that were sound and graded 2-minus or better were allowed to be sold through the sale organization. This grading and sifting practice found favor among the commercial cattlemen buying bulls and is one of the main reasons why this particular sale is so distinctly different from others.

Higher price

Over the 14-year period, during which record of performance grades formed the basis for judging, the average price received for bulls at Red Bluff has been higher than at most other sales (Herefords, $870; Angus, $612; Shorthorns, $667). The tables and graphs with this article offer a summary of the prices, grades, numbers, etc., for the history of this largest graded range bull sale in the country.

The table gives a summary of the numbers, percentages and prices received by grade and breed for bulls sold, as well as percentages and number of bulls sifted. For example, in the Hereford breed during 1951 through 1964, a total of 3,729 bulls were consigned. Of this number, 10.4% were sifted out; 23% graded 2-minus; 47.3% graded 2; and 16.9% graded 2-plus. Only 2.3% of these bulls reached the 1-minus bracket and only one bull consigned during these years graded a straight 1. The average percentage grade for all these Hereford cattle was 86.9—in other words, they averaged grade 2.

In the Hereford breed, cattlemen paid $1,244 more at this sale for 1-minus bulls than they did for 2-plus animals. They paid $330 more for 2-plus than for straight 2's; and $260 more for a grade 2 bull than a 2-minus animal. This indicates the importance of conformation of beef cattle in determining sales values of animals.

Angus, Shorthorn

The table also indicates that 24% of the Angus and 12% of the Shorthorns were sifted out. Although the spread in price between grades in Shorthorn and Angus animals was not as great as for Herefords, cattlemen still paid more money for the top-grading bulls than they did for the low-grading animals.

Graph 1 illustrates by breed, the number of bulls sold each year. The largest number of Hereford bulls (370) were sold in 1952, and 1961 (330). On the other hand, the Shorthorn and Angus consignments remained quite steady throughout the last fourteen years.

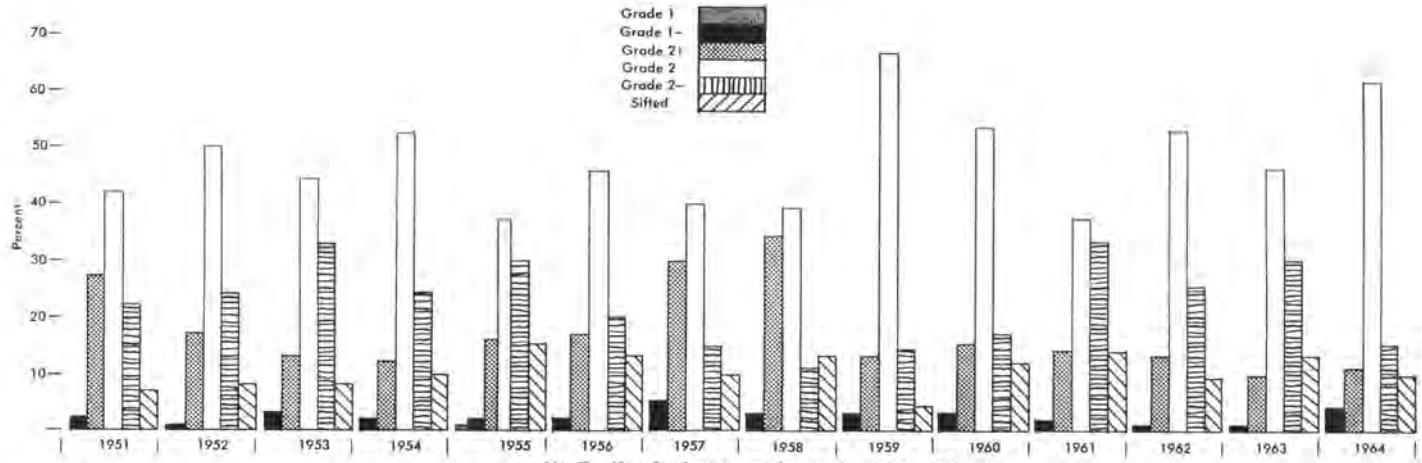
Graph 2 shows prices paid during these years for each breed; also the price per hundredweight of choice yearling steers during that time. From these data it appears that the price of choice yearling steers is somewhat more stable than the price of purebred bulls. There does not seem to be much correlation between the number sold and the price received; however, there is a correlation on the price curve between breeds. When the price for Hereford bulls was down, it was also down for the other breeds, and vice versa.

Graph 3 shows that the greatest variation in prices paid for Hereford bulls occurred within the 1-minus grade group. The highest price paid was in 1952 when the average received was $5,600 and the lowest average price received for 1-minus grade bulls was $1,400 in 1957.

Graphs 4 and 5 show that average prices paid for Angus and Shorthorn bulls during the 14-year history of this marketing event were not as high as for the Herefords.

Grading

Graph 7 indicates that the highest percentage of Hereford bulls graded 2 each year. During 1951, 1957 and 1958, the number of 2-plus bulls exceeded 2-minus bulls, but in all other years, the 2-minus bulls outnumbered the 2-plus animals. The percent of bulls sifted out remained quite stable. The lowest number sifted was



No. 7 Hereford—Percent by grade 1951–64

4% in 1959 and the highest number occurred in 1955 when 15% of the bulls were sifted.

Graph 8 shows the percentage of Angus bulls by grade. These are somewhat different from the Hereford statistics because the per cent sifted and percentage of 2-minus bulls is much greater than was found in the Hereford breed. In Graph 8, as in the other bar charts, considerable variation exists between years as to quality (grade) of cattle. For example, in 1961 and 1963, the largest percentage of 2-minus Shorthorn bulls was sold; while in 1952, 1958 and 1959 the highest percentage of 2-plus bulls was recorded.

Steer equivalent

Graph 6 shows the number of 600-lb choice feeder steers equivalent in value to a grade 2 bull. All three breeds are included in this graph. For the Hereford breed, it seems that about one-half of the time five or more 600-lb choice steers would have been required to purchase one grade 2 bull. The purpose of the bar charts was to determine whether or not grades-by-years could be used to determine trends in the quality of bulls consigned.

Sifting increase

The overall percentage of sifted bulls tended to increase slightly over the years for all breeds. Little change was apparent in percentage of 1-minus animals. The 2-plus percentage in Herefords and Shorthorns decreased slightly except for 1957 and 1958 in Herefords and 1958 and 1959 in Shorthorns when a sharp rise was apparent. Angus bulls showed a drastic decrease in 2-plus bulls over the years with the exception of 1954, 1955 and 1958. Grade 2 increased overall during the years in Herefords and Shorthorns. Lows appeared in 1955, 1957, 1958 and 1961 in Herefords and in 1954, 1958, 1961 and 1963 in Shorthorns. Angus animals, by contrast, showed a decrease in grade 2 except during the years 1959, 1962 and 1964.

A gradual decrease occurred in percentage of 2-minus Herefords except in 1961, 1962 and 1963. Shorthorns showed the same general trend with the exception of 1961 and 1963. Angus showed a general increase in 2-minus bulls over the 14-year span. In general, quality grade in Hereford bulls consigned tended to shift gradually to center on grade 2. This change was less pronounced with Shorthorns. In the Angus breed, this shift was greater and toward a lower grade with the relative proportion of 2-minus bulls increased.

Variability factors

Several of the factors contributing to the variability of these data include: inconsistency of sifting and grading due to the human element, or conditions under which grading was conducted; bulls penned loose for grading during certain years; variation in numbers of new consignors; small numbers of bulls within a certain grade as in the 1-minus bracket; changes in sale regulations regarding condition of bulls entered; and normally expected year-to-year variations in breed quality, due to shifting environment and heredity. A concerted effort to eliminate the dwarf gene during the late 1950's may also have had an effect on conformation and quality of cattle.

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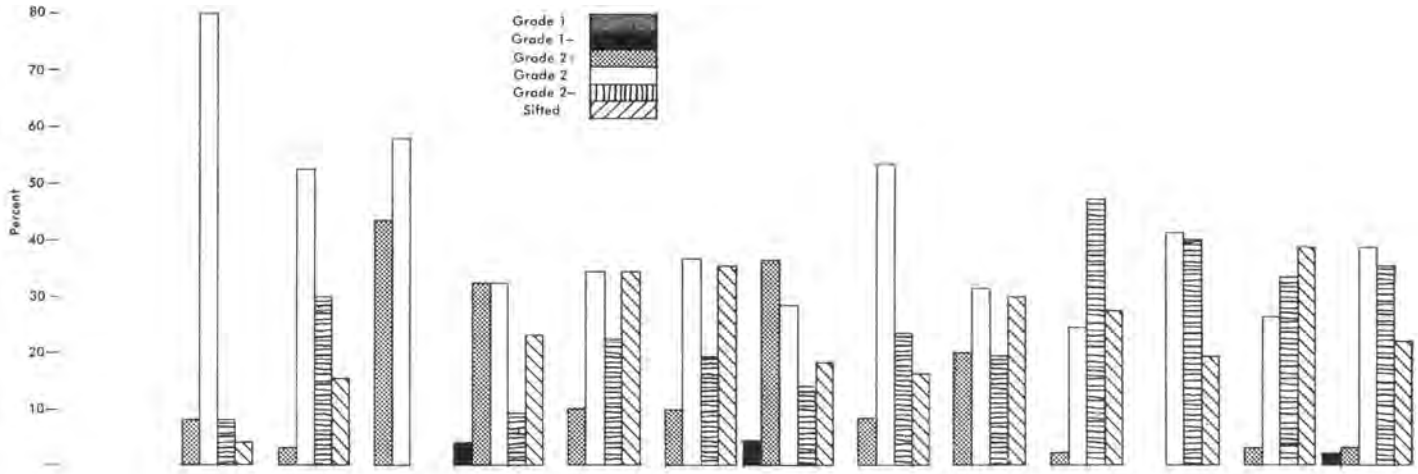
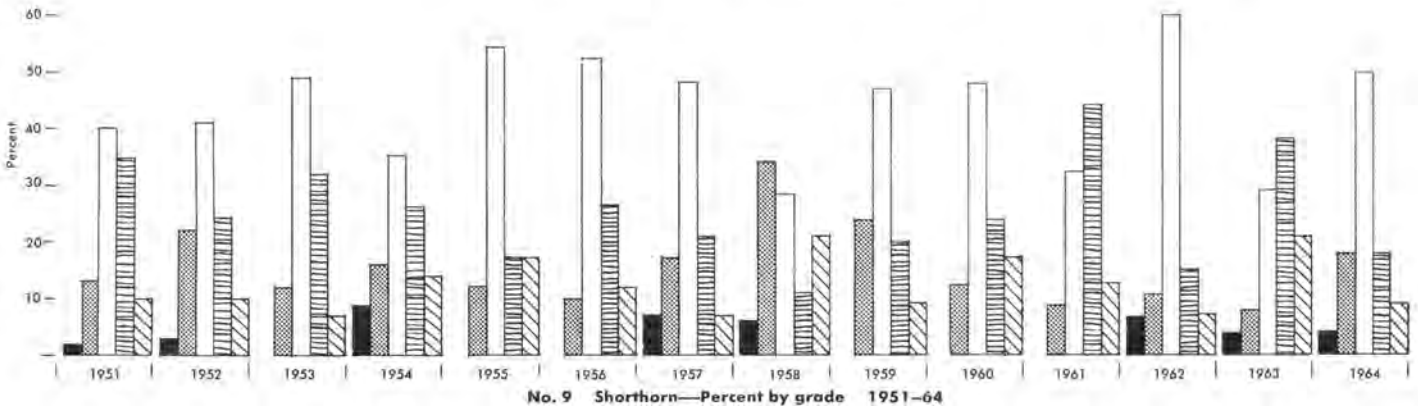


No. 8 Angus—Percent by grade 1951–64



No. 9 Shorthorn—Percent by grade 1951–64