



*We've all heard the phrase
"A picture is worth a thousand words."*

*The fact of the matter is a picture is worth
thousands of words.*

A bad picture is worth twice that.

PHOTOGRAPHING A TEXAS LONGHORN

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Longhorn marketing has come a long way in the last 10 years. With *Hired Hand Software's* system and social media outlets like Facebook and Instagram, Longhorn promotion has changed. In my Father's day when he ran G&G he had one full page ad a month in the Trails and the old fashion way of developing pictures and snail mailing them to potential customers. But that's after you either cold call potential customers to see what people are looking for; very rarely was anyone calling to kick tires like they do when browsing a website. For ranches like ours in Virginia you don't get too much foot traffic when it comes to showing off cattle like you do at other locations throughout the country with ranch tours. So you have to be able to reach the people effectively and efficiently. In today's Internet and social media opportunities good photos mean more now more than ever before.

SO WHY IS TAKING A GOOD PHOTO SO IMPORTANT?

It's just a photo, go out and snap one, you see the cow has horn, you see the cow has color, what else do you need? Simple. What do you look at when you go see a cow in person? You want to see how the cow stands, you want to see the horn shape and set, you want to see if there's anything wrong with her confirmation, how clean the neck or naval is, and how the udder or testicle development is coming along. If you take a good photo your chances of getting a phone call from an interested party are much higher than a photo that didn't make an impression. Here are some techniques that we focus on to benefit our program. These are some of the easiest ways to make yours photos better.



Almost a perfect picture if her back legs were opposite.

Dale Smith
Lago Haven Ranch, Allen, TX

"My mistakes included standing up and not getting low, having other cows in the picture, cubing the cows while photographing them and getting photos with their mouths open. Other mistakes were having the sun behind the cow and not me. I'd try to photograph them midday."

CORRECT STANCE

This is the single most important part of a good picture. The photographer should be perpendicular to the cow. A cow needs to be standing with their front legs square, their head up looking towards the photographer, their inside back leg needs to be back and their outside back leg forward. This pose will show off the cow's top line, naval, udder/testicles, hip, shoulder, and how clean their frame is along with their horn growth. Many times you can find me in a pasture whistling, throwing my hat in the air, or jumping up and down to try to get a cow's attention who's standing correctly as is.

PROPER LEVEL

You don't want to take away from the size and development of an animal. You want your photo level to be level with the animal. Taking a photo from above the animal will make the animal seem smaller than it really is especially if the photographer is a taller person. On the flip side if you take a picture from level lower than should be you'll take away the proper light and also taking away the opportunity to see the proper top line of the animal. You want to be perfectly level with the cow itself.

GOOD LIGHT

Lighting is so key to a good photo. You don't want to take a picture with the sun behind the cow because that'll change the color of the cow itself. Make sure your shadow isn't growing across the cow either. Setting up with your back to the sun will make for a really wonderful picture that shows off the best in your cow's color. Midday is typically a hard time to get a great photo as the overhead sun creates shadows on the sides of the cow.

Alexandra Dees
CR Longhorns, Harper, OR

"I have been thinking about an answer to this question. My situation is purely my own of being so far away from any other breeder that I might



Picture perfect. Cow's body is lined up just right for a photo.

buy a cow from that I have to use the picture to make a decision on buying. It has to give me some security and confidence in the animal. I hate photos that are from the front only and that do not allow me to see the top line and body of the animal. I will buy a cow off of one photo if it tells me everything I need to know. The classic side shot with the head facing me directly at the camera can show you enough about the balance and quality of the animal. If you are lucky you will also see the udder well. I can overlook a busy background if the cow is shown well."

CLEAR BACKGROUND

Having a cluttered background will take the focus away from your cow. A balanced picture without other cows, equipment, ATVs, etc will really make your photos stand out. There's no secret other than doing all you can to keep the background from being cluttered.

SETTING UP A GOOD SHOT

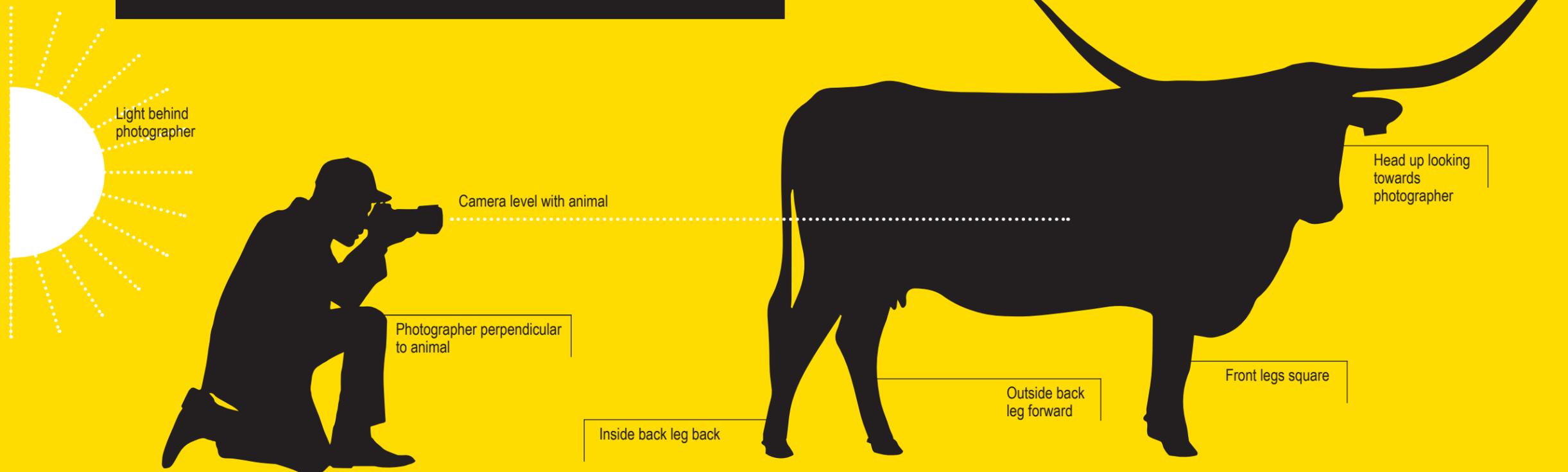


Illustration by Hired Hand Website Software.

GETTING THE BACKGROUND RIGHT



Cow is standing perfect but if we want to be critical it would have been nice to have the others behind her out of the background.



Great lighting and stance but the pipe fence in the background blends into the animal. A clear background is less distracting.

DON'T FEED YOUR COWS TO TAKE PICTURES

Feeding your cows in hopes you'll get a good photo is like thinking you can get your kids to cooperate by taking them to the amusement park. What you'll get mostly is cows with their mouths open, other cows in the background, pictures of cows being hooked and pushed around. They are more concerned about eating rather than standing correct.



PROPER TIME OF DAY

Finding the right time of day will help you with finding the right light and getting cattle that aren't all cluttered together. For instance, trying to take a midday photo shoot in the summer when the cattle are in the timber or ponds to avoid the heat is a waste of time. For us in the east with our humid summers the mornings and evening are simply the best time when the cattle are out standing about before it gets too hot. If you watch your cows enough you know that when they're in the mode to graze you're not going to get their attention. So when they're in that mode don't go out to try and take photos. You'll get frustrated and they'll be walking around with their heads down. In the fall and spring when the nights are cooler and they cows are waiting for the morning sun to warm them up they're usually standing perfect calm cool and collective. Knowing the movements of your herd at the time of year will increase your ability to get a good photo and save you a bunch of time.



Taken from too far in front of the bull and not being balanced toward the center of his body. Also an awkward cow behind the bull.



Great contrast and color.

GOOD EQUIPMENT

Smart phones make great tools when you're out and about in a pasture, to post to social media "look at this sweet heifer" but to make a really marketable photo for your site or advertisement nothing beats a good quality camera with a good lens. It's a great investment that'll serve you well.

*Dr. Mark Gilliland,
Gilliland Ranch, Winfield, KS*

"The following summarizes my photographic philosophy at the Gilliland Ranch.

First, I use a Nikon D 3400 with 2 lenses, an 18-55mm and 70-300mm. It is a relatively cheap and sturdy camera that gives me a lot of versatility in the automatic mode. While manual settings can produce a better photograph (if you have the patience and time), rapid fire photos in the automatic mode with subsequent editing work better for me.

Second, I always take my camera with me and use it almost every time I am with the cattle. I typically take 20-50 photographs, cull 90% of them and then download the good ones on my computer. I think potential buyers want as much information as possible before the purchase. Looking at one photograph in a sale catalog is not as good as viewing the stages of development from birth to present time. I always refer them to my Hired Hand website to see multiple photos. The more the better. As a breeder, studying serial photographs educates me in changing colors, conformations and horn sets overtime. It seems like every time I forget my camera, something interesting happens that I missed.

Third, if I am photographing animals for an ad, e-blast or website, I do it on a sunny day to enhance color and muscle definition. I try to put the sun at my back to minimize shadowing. I also photograph them

in a natural pasture setting by themselves or at least with minimal surrounding cattle so that I can crop distractions with editing.

Fourth, the camera and body positions are important. I get out of the truck and typically squat so the photograph is as close to the center of the body as possible. This angle accurately demonstrates leg and body length, depth, top line and underline. Photographs taken above from the truck make the animal look shorter.

For leg position, I try to get the front legs somewhat straddled to avoid the "post" appearance. The hind leg closer to the camera should extend backward to expose the genitalia and enhance the hip.

The head should be UP and turned 90 degrees looking into the camera to demonstrate head and ear shape and horn set. Cattle photographed with their heads down are seemingly depressed and do not sell well. Getting the head up can be challenging. I never feed them before a photography session otherwise their heads are glued to the ground. Sometimes, I have them chase the feed truck for a distance just to get them excited. Their heads are then high with anticipation and I quickly take photographs of the ones that need updating. Other head raising techniques include jumping, shouting, pushing on them or waving a flag.

Fifth, I always leave my dog behind on a serious photographic session. Otherwise, the cattle spend all their time looking at him and never at the camera.

Finally, good photography plays an integral role in portraying longhorns. It requires patience and a little luck. That said, too much perfection is time consuming and frustrating as eventually the animal must stand on his own merit in person. Each breeder should compare his photos with those found on other websites to insure they are competitive with industry standards."

TIME OF YEAR

In Virginia our best time of year to take photos is October and November. The grass is still green, the cattle are in great body condition, the sun light is usually warm, and the bugs aren't around bugging the cows. The time of year really comes into play for those consigning cattle to spring sales especially to those who face cold winters. Taking a photo in February for a consignment deadline due with muddy pastures of fuzzy cattle who have been supplemented all winter does not make for the best photo. Planning for your sale cattle photos in the late fall, early winter are much better than late winter.

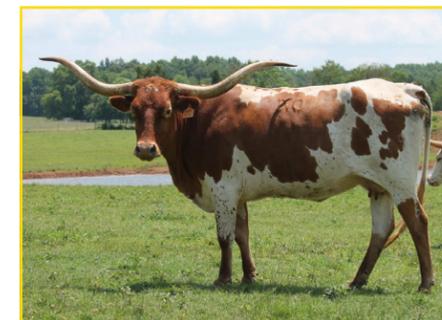


About as perfect as can be for a winter picture.

These tips and hints have worked well for us. However, the best tool to take with you to the pasture is patience. Many times bad photos are taken out of rushing.



Photographer above cow, back legs set wrong, horn cut off.



Even though the cow is position right, level is good, the sun is wrong and takes away the color of the cow.

Take your camera with you to the pasture in the evening to snap some good photos and walk amongst your cattle. You'll be surprised of the quality you get.

“...While manual settings can produce a better photograph (if you have the patience

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bear Davidson is the Ranch Manager of G&G Longhorns in Rochelle, VA. Along with running a Longhorn ranch, Bear is also consulting through Eastwind StockCo Consulting for multiple programs across the country.

You can find out more about G&G Longhorns and Eastwind StockCo Consulting at www.gandgtexaslonghorns.com and www.eastwindcattle.com to find cattle to fit any of your Longhorn needs.



Photo by Joe Sedlecek, Lazy J Longhorns.



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ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Molly Clubb is the owner of Hired Hand Website Software. Laura Sigmund is a Creative Specialist for Hired Hand. Together they worked with Bear Davidson, Eastwind StockCo to develop the custom graphics and layout for this helpful article.

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For information on all of Hired Hand's creative services please visit their website at www.HiredHandSoftware.com. You can also follow them on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat.

EXAMPLES OF GREAT SHOTS



All of these photos show the animals standing correctly, great light, no clutter in the background.