

DEPARTMENT 39 – CURED MEATS

Superintendents: Dr. Bailey Harsh & Dianne Handsaker

Premiums Offered: \$875.00

General Requirements & Criteria for Competition

1. General rules apply to all divisions in this department.
2. Competition is open to all meat processors who smoke ham and bacon, and who manufacture beef jerky, snack sticks or bratwurst for their patrons.
3. Completed entry forms must be received by Dr. Bailey Harsh, 210 Meat Science Laboratory, 1503 South Maryland Drive, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois 61801.
4. Exhibitors are limited to one (1) entry per class for Bacon, Ham, and Jerky, and two (2) entries in the Snack Stick and Bratwurst classes. All entries must be processed in the plant of the exhibitor and must be properly labeled.
5. HAMS can be of any weight and will consist of one class only – light cured, commercial bone-in style. This class shall be mildly cured ham, may or may not be tenderized, and is considered to consist principally of pumped hams, which require refrigeration.
BACON can be of any weight and will likewise consist of one class only. Entries can have the rind either on or off but must be cured and smoked. Non-traditional flavors are allowable but subject to evaluation by the judge.
BEEF JERKY may be made from any type of meat. All jerkies must be adequately dried to meet the required moisture/protein ration of 0.75:1 or less. Excessively “wet” product will be downgraded or disqualified. Jerky must be made from one whole piece of meat. One half pound of jerky is required for submission.
SNACK STICKS require two vacuum packages of ten snack sticks from each exhibitor. Non-meat ingredients are subject to evaluation by the judge.
BRATWURST allows for natural or collagen casing. Standard bratwurst style and flavored products are eligible for this class. Six bratwursts are required for submission. Entries can either be fully cooked or fresh.
6. Entries shall be judged by a qualified judge, and the judge shall be required to disqualify any product which does not meet any of the rules or requirements of the show or that possesses an obvious blemish. Whenever practicable and possible, the judge shall consult with people whose product is being considered for disqualification before any decision is made. Decisions of the judge shall be final.
7. The ham, bacon, snack sticks, beef jerky and bratwurst scoring the highest number of points shall be declared the first-place winners; the products scoring the next highest number of points shall be the winners of the second place, etc.
8. Each entry shall be registered by filling out a registration form, handled exclusively by the committee assigned.
9. Entries in the Cured Meats Show will be accepted for registration from July 27, 2026, until July 30, 2026, at the University of Illinois Meat Science Laboratory (1503 S. Maryland Drive, Urbana, IL). Specific directions to location for entry will be mailed to those sending in completed entry forms. Each entry will be tagged and coded in such a way that the identity will remain unknown to judges.
10. Judging will be completed, and video recorded at the University of Illinois Meat Lab on August 1, 2026. Recording can be played and assessed at the Agriculture Tent by request of a plant.
11. On Wednesday, August 19, 2026, the Illinois State Fair Commodities Auction will be held. The Champion Ham, Bacon, Snack Sticks, Beef Jerky and Bratwurst will be sold at the auction, with the proceeds going to the Sleeter Bull Scholarship Fund, a fund to aid the study of Meat Science at the University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign, Illinois.

Division 3901 – Cured Meats

Class No.	Class Description	Premiums
01	Bacon	\$60-\$45-\$30-\$25-\$15
02	Beef Jerky	\$60-\$45-\$30-\$25-\$15
03	Bratwurst	\$60-\$45-\$30-\$25-\$15
04	Ham	\$60-\$45-\$30-\$25-\$15
05	Snack Sticks	\$60-\$45-\$30-\$25-\$15

An award will be given to the champion in each class.

Basis for Judging Hams

- General Appearance – 200 points; Hams are graded on eye appeal, conformation, trim and cutability or yield. Scoring for general appearance will be done in two phases allowing up to 100 points for eye appeal, conformation and trim before cutting and 100 points for cutability and yield after cutting.
- Aroma – 150 points; Off or foreign and sour or sharp odors will downgrade the ham and the good mellow aroma that pleases the judge will upgrade it.
- Texture of Cut Surface – 100 points; Excessive moisture is objectionable. The ham should not be too coarse grained. There should not be an excess of fat marbled in the ham.
- Inside Color – 150 points; The color should be uniform and appealing. It should not be too light or too red and bruises would score quite heavily against color. If a ham should be noticeably cooler than the rest of the hams, giving it an advantage in color and firmness, this will be considered and graded accordingly.
- Flavor – 400 points; A full half-size of ham from the cushion side of the ham will be cooked and taste samples taken. They should not be too salty or too bland and should have the good mellow flavor expected in a good commercial ham.

Basis for Judging Bacon

- General Appearance – 150 points; Eye appeal, conformation and outside color will be the main points considered. Bacon may be skinned or unskinned.
- Fat to Lean (after Cut) – 150 points; Lean bacon is very desirable and will be scored accordingly unless it is so lean that it would indicate a poor-quality hog or that it been excessively trimmed.
- Aroma – 100 points; Off or sour odors will downgrade the bacon, and a good smooth aroma should upgrade it.
- Texture – 100 points; Pumped bacon may be downgraded in texture if it appears to have excess moisture. Temperatures of the bacon should be considered in scoring texture since cooler bacon would be firmer.
- Inside Color – 100 points; Lean should be light red, and fat should be white. Color should be uniform. Bruises will downgrade the bacon.
- Flavor – 400 points; Flavor should be a full rich flavor that pleases the judge, not too salty, not too bland and off flavors would downgrade it heavily.

Basis for Judging Beef Jerky

- External Uniformity of Color – 100 points; Eye appeal, conformation and general appearance will be considered.
- External Uniformity of Shape – 100 points; Shape and thickness will be considered.
- External Lack of Defects – 100 points; Fat caps and lack of uniformity in wrinkles will be considered.
- Internal Lack of Defects – 50 points
- Flavor – 300 points; Flavor should be a full rich flavor that pleases the judge, not too overwhelming of any particular flavor.
- Texture and Mouthfeel – 300 points; Excessive moisture and chewiness is objectionable.
- Aroma – 50 points; Off or sour odors will downgrade the product, and a smooth aroma should upgrade it.

Basis for Judging Snack Sticks

- Visual Appearance and Workmanship – 300 points; Uniformity of color, uniformity of shape and lack of defects.
- Internal Appearance – 300 points; Uniformity of color, uniformity of texture, fat to lean ratio, and lack of obvious defects.
- Palatability – 400 points; Taste, texture/mouthfeel.

Basis for Judging Bratwurst

- External Appearance – 250 points; Uniformity of color will be 100 points, uniformity of shape and diameter will be 100 points, and lack of defects (e.g. air pockets, wrinkles, fat caps) will be 50 points.
- Internal Appearance – 275 points; Uniformity of texture will be 100 points, fat to lean ratio will be 100 points, and lack of obvious defects will be 75 points.
- Edibility – 475 points; Cooked aroma will be 75 points, taste will be 300 points, and texture/mouthfeel will be 100 points. Note: The presence of strong aftertastes will be downgraded. Flavors such as rancidity will also be downgraded.

For further information concerning product for show or judging criteria, contact Dr. Bailey Harsh, 210 Meat Science Laboratory, 1503 S. Maryland Drive, Urbana, IL 61801. Email: bharsh2@illinois.edu.

END OF DEPARTMENT 39 - CURED MEATS