Winners Announced in Steak Contest
Merrill Cattle Takes Top Honors for Second Straight Year

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By Mark Peters

A steak dynasty in the making?

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The competition, which seeks to treat steak tasting like the judging of a fine wine, was the subject of a page-one story in the Wall Street Journal last month. Contest winners were announced Wednesday in Kansas City, Mo.

Mark and Linda Merrill, whose ranch is located in central Washington, specialize in beefalo, an animal that is typically three-eighths bison. One judge described their ribeye as “Seriously tender. Melt in your mouth. Unbelievable. So flavorful.”

In the grain-fed category, Munson Premium Angus Beef in Kansas was named grand champion, with judges describing the steak as “buttery,” having “roast notes” and possessing a “nice juicy finish.”

Deanna Munson said she and her husband, Charles, relied on a combination of genetics, feed and timing to produce their winning steak. Their Angus herd dates back to the 1920s, and while finishing the cattle on grain, the animals graze on what Mrs. Munson described as the best grasslands in the world. Then Mr. Munson has to know exactly when to send an animal to slaughter.

“My husband has an excellent eye,” Mrs. Munson said.

American Royal, a 114-year-old nonprofit organization known for hosting the world’s largest barbecue contest, branched out into steaks last year. The competition puts the focus on the meat rather than its preparation. Nearly three dozen ranchers entered their boneless ribeyes, which were cooked uniformly and judged last month in near-silence by food experts, who were instructed to spit out each morsel after sampling it.

Mrs. Munson agreed with the bare-bones take on preparation. “We never marinate anything. I just die when we get a steak that’s marinated,” she said.