

## Meet Our Working Steers



At Billings Farm we have a pair of Jersey steers that are 2.5 years old. They are being trained by our teamster Amy. Their names are Colt and Rooster, and in a year and a half they will be considered oxen.

### What is a Steer?

What is a steer and how is it different from a bull or an ox? A steer is a castrated male, meaning it can't reproduce. A Working Steer is a steer that has been trained to do work. When a Working Steer turns 4 years old and is fully grown, it will then be called an Ox. A bull is a male that can still produce an offspring.

Working Steers and oxen are called draft animals because they do work on the farm. They can do the same type of work as horses, but oxen are slower, steadier, and can work longer than horses. This can be advantageous for farmers who need to plow large fields where horses might get tired or work too fast for the machinery.

## Training Steers and Oxen

Working Steers and oxen need to be trained for farmers to work with them. A big difference between steers and horses when they are working is that farmers use reins with horses to control them but with steers, they use voice commands. The person who trains the steers is called the teamster and the commands they use are:

- Get up: go forward
- Whoa: stop
- Back: back up
- Gee: turn right
- Haw: turn left

Steers often work together in teams in a yoke. This is a piece of wood with two “bows” that go under steers’ necks. The yoke can be attached to many different implements like a plow or stone boat. If you’d like to learn how to put steers in a yoke you can watch this quick video:

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/players/offsite/index.html?videoid=100000000802394>

Check out this great video showing how 4-H members learn to train steers and oxen from calves to adults: <https://youtu.be/5hymCOfzDp8>

# Billings Farm & Museum

## Working Steers and Oxen

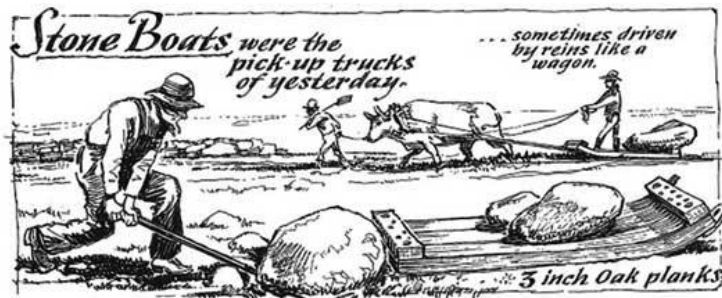
### Quick Facts

- A steer is a castrated male, an ox is a 4+ year old castrated male cattle, and a bull is a male that can produce an offspring.
- Steers and oxen are called Draft Animals because they are animals that do work on farms.
- Steers and oxen work slower than horses, but they are steadier and can work longer than horses.
- Steers and oxen are trained to work with the teamster next to them using voice commands instead of behind them with reins like horses.
- Steers and oxen use 5 commands to do everything the famer needs from them.
- A yoke is three pieces of wood, a yoke beam and two bows, which the steers or oxen put their heads through.
- They can pull many different implements including stone boats and plows.
- At Billings Farm, we have a pair of Jersey working steers called Colt and Rooster. They are two and a half years old.



Example of a yoke from the Billings Farm & Museum collection.

Oxen in yoke pulling a plow in a demonstration at Billings Farm & Museum.



A modern stone boat (left) and an old advertisement for stone boats (right).