

Welfare decisions for beef cows

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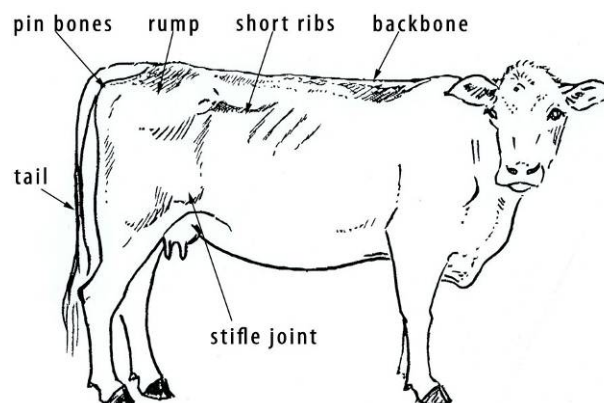
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Livestock managers, advisers, transport operators and welfare officials need to make decisions about feeding, suitability for transport or sale of cattle and, in extreme cases, their humane destruction on the property. These decisions are difficult, and often must be made by people under heavy emotional stress.

This document is intended to give clear, practical guidelines on assessing the status of affected cows and on deciding what should be done with them.

Assessing animals

The diagram below shows the key sites for assessing an animal's status. Use the chart over the page to decide the status of animals and the action required.



Key assessment sites

Introduction

At times such as during drought, reduced feed intake causes beef cows to lose body condition. As this happens, they progressively become infertile, their milk dries up and their commercial beef (salvage) value declines.

If they lose condition further, their body reserves can become insufficient for them to withstand mustering, yarding, transport or sale. If they become very weak they are at risk of death during wet weather or if placed under any form of stress. It is unacceptable to the community and is illegal to allow stock to reach this condition.



Welfare decisions

	Fat score 1	Poor	Very poor
			
Brief description	Lean but strong and healthy and with no significant muscle wastage. Reduced reproductive performance likely.	Healthy but with significant muscle wastage. Unlikely to conceive. Able to recover in time if adequately fed.	Weak, with very low body reserves. At risk of death from cold, wet weather or other stress. Recovery dependent on high quality care and will be slow.
Transport, sale	Suitable for transport and sale but with minimum time off feed	Unsuitable for sale through saleyards or transport over long distances	Not fit to travel
Backbone	Easily seen.	Spines of backbone identifiable.	Spines of backbone individually identifiable.
Short ribs	Visible but not individually. Fairly sharp to touch	Prominent and very sharp to touch	Very prominent and easy to see individually.
Inside pin bones	Slightly sunken	Sunken	Deeply sunken to the bone
Muscle wastage	Rump muscle concave (between hooks and pins).	Rump muscle concave. Muscle wastage in loin and leg muscle evident.	Muscle wastage obvious over whole body. Rump and leg muscles deeply concave.
Stifle joint		Stifle joint not identifiable	Stifle joint identifiable
Tail bones	Individual bones not identifiable.	Individual bones just able to be felt.	Individual bones easily felt.
Skin	Pliable.	Less pliable.	Tight.
Appearance	Bright, alert.	Healthy.	Lacking energy or dull.
Mobility	Normal gait.	Mobile, able to lie down/rise with ease.	Unsteady gait, may drag hind feet or plait hind legs. Difficulty lying down/standing up.
Ability to calve	Some assistance required.	Moderate assistance required.	High level of assistance required.
Actions required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be fed adequately to prevent further weight loss. • Suitable for transport to agistment. • Suitable for sale but must not be kept off feed for extended periods. • Supervise and be ready to assist during calving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be fed adequately to prevent weight loss. • Suitable for transport direct to agistment. • Suitable for sale only direct to farm or abattoir. • Supervise closely and be ready to assist during calving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not transport. • Must be given high quality feed, water and care; OR • Destroy on farm. • Supervise closely and be ready to assist during calving.

Criteria for destruction on property

Some cattle may require humane destruction on property. They should be destroyed if they in poor or very poor condition as described above and meet any of the following conditions:

- Fall down or are knocked over easily.
- Unable to stand without assistance.
- Very unsteady gait, staggering, plaiting in hind legs.
- Adequate good quality feed cannot be provided.
- Adequate good quality water cannot be provided.
- Uneconomic to transport, sell or feed.



Further information

The NSW Department of Primary Industries website has detailed information on drought management and feeding. See www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/drought or contact your local livestock adviser.

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (May 2007). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

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