

Determining the condition of cattle in drought

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Introduction

Condition of cattle can be described as how fat they are (fat score). The easiest way to determine the condition of beef cattle initially is to examine some photographs showing beef cattle at various fat scores, and compare them with your cattle. How to more accurately assess fat score of cattle can be found in Primefact 282 *Visual and manual assessment of fatness in cattle*.

Fat score 1

The welfare of cattle at fat score 1 is at risk (see Figure 1). Cattle in this condition are often said to be at **critical survival weight**. If their condition deteriorates any further, they will die. Stockowners who fail to care for their stock and to provide

adequate food and shelter may be prosecuted under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*. Feeding systems should be implemented immediately to keep animals like this alive, and to lift their condition above this critical level.

Fat score 2

Cattle should be kept at a minimum of fat score 2 (see Figure 2) during drought for optimal production; any loss of fat will impair their performance, and place the animal under stress.

Fat score 3

Please refer to Primefact 282 *Visual and manual assessment of fatness in cattle*.

Fat score 4

If your cattle are at fat score 4 going into drought (see Figure 3), you have little to worry about. In fact, allowing them to **slowly** lose condition and

Figure 1. Fat score 1



Figure 2. Fat score 2



Figure 3. Fat score 4



weight is a reasonable option. It is very important not to let their condition fall too quickly, as this will affect their welfare and can be fatal.

Further information

For a more detailed description on assessing condition/fatness of beef cattle, see Primefact 282 *Visual and manual assessment of fatness in cattle*.

Acknowledgment

This Primefact is based on information contained in an earlier publication, Agnote DAI-162 *Assessing the condition of beef cattle*, written by Bill McKiernan (formerly Technical Specialist Beef Grazing Systems) and Ed Clayton (former Livestock Officer).

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