

Welfare decisions for cattle

Current as of December 2023.

Cattle on poor or little pasture will lose body condition, as will cattle compromised by internal parasites and certain diseases. These guidelines help you assess your cattle to decide what action to take if their condition drops.

Cattle that fall to Body Condition Score (BCS) 1 or less are at risk, and if the pasture doesn't supply the required nutrition, you will need to supplement or handfeed them daily. Pregnant and lactating cows will require twice as much feed per day. In addition to provision of adequate feed, cattle in poor condition may need veterinary care to identify the presence of any disorder.

Livestock owners have a duty of care to provide adequate feed and clean water. **It is not acceptable to leave cattle in poor condition to weaken and die of starvation or disease.**

Legal requirements for the transport and sale of cattle

- The *Animal Welfare (Transport, Saleyards and Depots) (Cattle and Sheep) Regulations 2020* (Transport Regulations), requires that cattle in BCS 1 or less cannot be transported unless a veterinarian has deemed the animal(s) fit to undertake the journey. The veterinarian must provide written approval to the transporter.
- Cattle in BCS 1 or less cannot be presented for sale. Criteria for destruction on property.

Criteria for destruction on property

Some cattle may require humane destruction on property. They should be destroyed if they are in a poor or very poor condition (see Table1).

Important Disclaimer

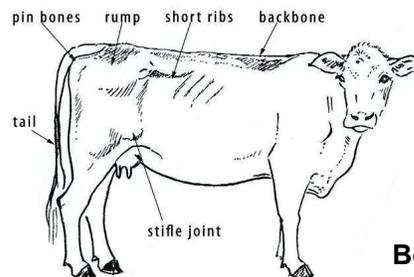
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They must also meet the following conditions:

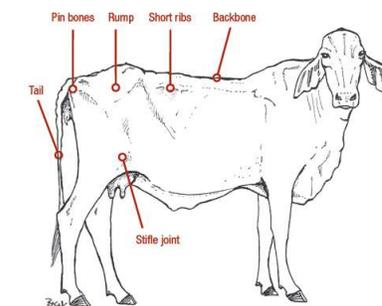
- They fall down or are knocked over easily.
- They cannot stand without assistance.
- They cannot stand without assistance.
- They have an unsteady gait, are staggering, are plaiting their hind legs.
- Adequate good quality feed and/or water cannot be provided.
- It is uneconomic or not possible to transport, sell or feed due to extenuating circumstances.

Assessing animals

These diagrams show the key sites for assessing an animal's condition.



Bos taurus

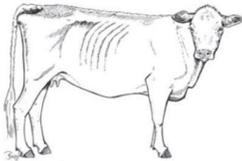
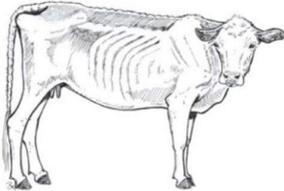
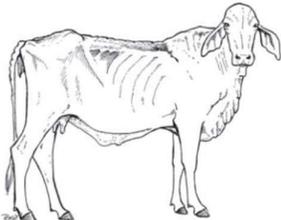
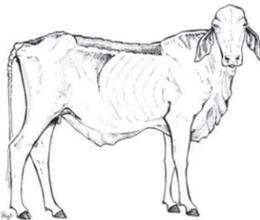


Bos indicus

More information



Table 1. Assessment of body condition. This table outlines the attributes that indicate if a cow is at risk, and how it should be managed (including whether it may need to be humanely destroyed).

Bos taurus	BCS 1: high risk	BCS 0: Extreme risk. Consider euthanising
		
Bos indicus		
General description	Healthy but with significant muscle wastage. Able to recover for transport if adequately fed.	Weak with no body reserves. At risk of death from cold, wet weather or other stressors. Recovery for transport dependent on high quality care but will be slow.
Backbone	Spines of backbone identifiable.	Spines of backbone easily identifiable.
Short ribs	Prominent and very sharp to touch.	Very prominent and easy to see individually.
Inside pin bones	Sunken.	Deeply sunken to the bone.
Muscle wastage	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 just able to be felt.	Individual bones easily felt.
Dewlap Hump (Bos indicus only)	Has no fat and slack skin over hump.	Skin fold and slack skin over hump.
Mobility and appearance	Mobile, able to lie down and rise. Alert.	Unsteady gait. May drag hind feet or plait hind legs. Difficulty lying down or standing up and maintaining balance. Lacking energy and unresponsive.
Transport, sale	Not fit for transport without veterinary approval. Not fit for sale.	Not fit for transport without veterinary approval. Not fit for sale.
Action required	Must be fed adequately to prevent weight loss. Seek veterinary advice to identify underlying causes.	Recovery dependent on high quality care and will be slow. Seek veterinary advice or destroy on-farm.