

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE WELFARE OF CATTLE

1. Food and Water

1.1 Food

All cattle should have access to a diet, which is nutritionally adequate to maintain health and meet the appropriate physiological requirements for growth, pregnancy, lactation and to withstand cold exposure. They should not be deprived of food for periods in excess of 24 hours.

In all systems of management, continual assessment should be made of the needs of the cattle in relation to the amount, quality and continuity of food supply.

Cattle should be excluded, as far as possible, from toxic plants and other substances suspected of being deleterious to their health.

1.2 Water

Cattle should preferably have ad lib access to water and in any case at least twice daily. This is especially important in lactating cows.

Mechanical equipment controlling the delivery of water should be inspected regularly and frequently in hot weather and be maintained in good working order. It is also essential that a water supply is maintained in freezing weather when pipes are liable to become frozen.

The quality of water provided should be adequate to maintain cattle health. Drinking water which contains potentially toxic levels of salts, or other deleterious substances, should be monitored and managed to minimise deleterious effects.

When sufficient good quality water to maintain health cannot be provided, the cattle should be moved to other areas where an adequate supply is available. As a rule, cattle should not be deprived of water for a period of more than 24 hours under normal conditions and 12 hours in hot weather. This is particularly important in lactating cows.

2. Protection from Climatic Extremes

All reasonable precautions should be taken to ensure that cattle are kept in camps that offer some form of natural shelter against high winds and rain/snow. This is particularly important to young animals and calving cows.

3. Supervision

Owners and managers, including absentee owners and managers should ensure that cattle are inspected with sufficient frequency to confirm that they are in sound and healthy condition. The frequency and thoroughness of such inspections should be related to the likelihood of risk to the welfare of the cattle in relation to food, water, and protection against natural disasters.

4. Handling Facilities

4.1 General

All sheds, pens, yards, ramps and other areas where cattle are handled should be constructed and maintained so as to minimise stress and injury to the animals.

Objects such as water and feed troughs, gate hinges and latches should be designed and located so as to avoid injury to cattle. Sharp projections must be avoided.

Yard designs should avoid sudden changes in floor level, poor lighting, narrow passages and awkward or 90 degree turns. Yard pens should be calf proof.

4.2 Handling and Restraint

Holding pens should be designed to minimise stress or injury and to allow all animals to lie down and to exercise.

Facilities for restraining cattle should allow for safe inspection and treatment of cattle. Races and crushes should be constructed in a way that minimises the danger to animals and handlers. Head restraints should allow for quick release to avoid choking.

Cattle should be handled quietly with the minimum of excitement. The use of sticks and dogs should be limited to the minimum necessary to complete the procedures. Cattle should not be prodded with sharpened sticks or pieces of metal.

Electric goads should only be used on the hindquarters of cattle over 1 year of age and only then when the way ahead of the animal is clear.

Unreasonable force like twisting an animal's tail is likely to cause breakage or dislocation and is unacceptable.

5. Management Practices

5.1 General

Restraint should be the minimum necessary to perform management procedures efficiently.

Procedures and practices that cause pain should not be carried out if painless and practical methods of husbandry can be adopted to achieve the same result.

Any injury, illness or distress observed should be treated at the earliest opportunity. If the stockman is unsure of the best treatment then veterinary assistance should be sought promptly.

5.2 Milking Practices

Cows in full milk (particularly early in lactation) should be milked at least twice daily unless they have a calf running with them.

Correct milking machine function and management of the milking procedure are essential to the welfare of dairy cattle. Milking machines should be checked and correctly adjusted by a competent person at least annually. Milking technique

should minimise the risks of discomfort or injury to the cow and the development or transmission of disease.

5.3 Castration

Castration by knife, burdizzo or emasculator without the use of local anaesthetic should be confined to animals under six months of age. Animals over this age should be castrated only with the use of local anaesthetic either injected into the testicle or into the spermatic cord. If in doubt veterinary advice should be sought.

Castration with rubber rings should be limited to calves up to 1 month of age.

5.4 Tail Docking

Tail docking is unacceptable except on medical grounds on the advice of a veterinary surgeon.

5.5 Identification

Ear tagging, notching or tattooing and freeze branding are the only acceptable methods of identification. Hot branding is unacceptable.

5.6 De-horning

If performed, de-horning should preferably be carried out before six months of age and always with the use of a local anaesthetic.

Whenever animals are gathered, horned cattle should be inspected for any signs of horns curling back into the skin. The tips of such horns can be sawn off without local anaesthetic providing there is no cutting into the sensitive tissue.

5.7 Mating

Heifers should be mated only when they have reached a sufficient size and maturity.

Female cattle should not be mated to bulls whose calves are likely to be too large to be born without difficulty.

Artificial insemination should only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon or trained inseminator.

5.8 Calving

Cows should be checked as frequently as possible coming up to calving so that difficulties can be promptly detected and attended to.

If traction is needed during calving this should only be applied by up to four men pulling. A calving machine or a rope with pulleys should be used only by stockmen with previous experience. Other means of traction are not acceptable. If the stockman is unsure of the best course of action then veterinary assistance should be sought.

Calves should receive colostrum preferably within 6 hours of birth and certainly within 12 hours.

5.9 Artificial Rearing of Calves

Artificially reared calves should be given milk or milk substitute until they are at least six weeks old. Roughage should be introduced into their diet from one week of life as should a good quality concentrate mix. Water should be provided ad lib.

6 Health

Sick, injured or diseased cattle should be treated promptly and appropriately or be humanely slaughtered. If the stockman is unsure of the best course of action then veterinary advice should be sought.

Cattle with cancer eye should be culled/treated at the earliest opportunity. The condition should not be allowed to progress simply to permit the cow to complete raising a calf.

Cows should have their feet trimmed whenever necessary in order to prevent overgrown and deformation of the hoof.

7 Humane Destruction of Cattle

The preferred methods of euthanasia or slaughter for home consumption are shooting using a free bullet or captive-bolt pistol by the frontal method. The shot should be positioned just to one side of the point of intersection of lines taken from the base of each ear to the opposite eye.

An animal stunned with a captive-bolt pistol must be immediately bled out by severing the major vessels of the neck as soon as it collapses to the ground. The operator should stand behind the neck to avoid injury from the animal's involuntary leg movements.

In certain extreme conditions when a firearm is not readily available exceptions to the recommended practices may be necessary. In such cases adequate restraint with throat cutting is permissible when there is genuine concern for the animal's welfare.

8 Feral Cattle

When feral cattle are to be culled or slaughtered for food they should be shot by a competent marksman using a bullet of suitable size and velocity to ensure a humane kill.