

# Score Sheet for the assessment of wellbeing in cattle

[Animal facility/Location of work:]



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF QUEENSLAND  
AUSTRALIA

Project title:			
Animal Ethics #		Name of contact person:	
Chief investigator:		Contact number:	
Research Group:		After hours number:	

Scoring of wellbeing will be performed relative to the following assessment criteria:

Criteria	Score			
	0	1 (mild)	2 (moderate)	3 (severe)
Demeanour (Activity and responsiveness)	Bright, alert and normally responsive (BAR)	Quieter than expected, but still alert and normally responsive (QAR), the animal may move as part of the tail of the mob.	Quiet, responsive to stimulus but slower than expected; part of the tail of the mob and the animal is found recumbent more frequently than expected	Dull, very slow moving; the animal is still responsive but sluggish to react, flight zones are noticeably reduced
Discharges (nasal and ocular)	Normal	Clear mucoid discharges (mild ocular inflammation may be present)	"Opal" or "milky" coloured discharges	Mucopurulent or bloody mucoid discharges
Lameness [Reference 1]	Stands and walks normally, sound in all 4 limbs	Slightly shortened stride, the head may be down, and back may arch when walking	Uneven weight bearing on one or more limbs, shortened stride, slower moving particularly around corners, back may arch when walking	Extreme reluctance to bear weight on one or more limbs, shortened stride, very slow moving (will be slower moving particularly around corners, back is often arched when standing and walking)
Body Condition Score (BCS): [Reference 2]	BCS 1-9: scores 4-6; BCS 0-5: scores 3-4	BCS 1-9: scores 3 or 7-9; BCS 0-5: score 2 or 5	BCS 1-9: score 2; BCS 0-5: score 1	BCS 1-9: score 1 BCS 0-5: score 0; and the animal appears physically weak.
Appetite and rumination	Normal appetite; cud chewing is occurring every 1-5 minutes	Reduced appetite; >25% feed refusal in one day; Some reduction in cud chewing (when at rest, not occurring once in 5 min)	>25% feed refusal for 3 consecutive days or >75% feed refusal for 1 day; Significant reduction in cud chewing (when at rest, not once in 10 min); mild rumen distention (e.g. mild bloat)	>75% feed refusal for 3 consecutive days; noticeable rumen distention (e.g. moderate to severe bloat)
Faeces [Reference 3]	Thick to stiff custard-like faeces that makes a well circumscribed pad	Sloppy faeces like thin custard that splashes when it hits the ground; or dry faeces that are stiff tight balls (like horse faeces)	Thin, watery faeces that splashes and runs along the ground like a watery "slushy" drink	Profuse watery faeces or foul-smelling diarrhoea which is persistent and impacting hydration status; significant volumes of blood within the faeces (e.g. causing anaemia)
Respiratory function	Normal respiratory effort; respiratory rate (RR) is 20-40 at rest	RR >40 at rest but no evidence of increased respiratory effort, animal may move as part of the tail of the mob	Mild respiratory effort which is exacerbated by exercise but no open mouth breathing or abdominal heaving, the animal may be slower to move but does not lie down under minimal pressure or exercise	Noticeably increased respiratory effort at rest; very slow and reluctant to move; any open mouth breathing or abdominal heaving; any indication of blue mucous membranes.

\*please note: feed refusal can only be accurately assessed in studies which individually pen cattle.

**Action required**, relative to observed score:

**Cumulative score 0** = No action (in addition to routine care and monitoring)

**Score 1 in one or more criteria** = Assess rectal temperature (if possible) and consult relevant animal technicians. Veterinary assessment may be required (particularly if the animal has an elevated temperature).


**Score 2 in any one criterion** = Assess rectal temperature (if possible) and consult relevant animal technicians. Veterinary advice should be sought if an elevated temperature is recorded, if symptoms are acute, or if symptoms relate to demeanour, lameness, appetite and rumination, or respiratory function.





**Score 3 in any one criterion** = Physical exam by a veterinarian is required as soon as possible. Euthanasia is indicated unless a management plan has been specifically prescribed by the independent consulting veterinarian.

**Comments:**





















Reference 1 – Lameness

Beef cattle lameness, image source: [Zinpro & Kansas State University, 2020](#)



	<b>0 Normal</b> Stands and walks normally. Hind feet land almost exactly in same spot as fore feet.
	<b>1 Mildly Lame</b> Shortened stride, head dropped slightly. No limp when walking.
	<b>2 Moderately Lame</b> Slight head bob when walking. Head is dropped and back, arched when standing.
	<b>3 Severely Lame</b> Constant arched back and head bob while walking. Great difficulty moving.

[Dairy Australia, 2021](#)

Score	Walking speed	Stride	Weight bearing	Backline	Head
<p><b>0</b> Walks evenly</p> <p>No action required</p> <p>This cow is normal</p>	<p>Confident. Similar walking speed to a person. Maintains position in the herd.</p> 	<p>Long, even and regular. Rear foot placement matches front foot placement.</p> 	<p>Evenly placed and weight bearing when standing and walking.</p> 	<p>Straight (level) at all times.</p> 	<p>Held in line or slightly below the backline and steady when walking.</p> 
<p><b>1</b> Walks unevenly</p> <p>Minor action required</p> <p>Record and keep an eye on her – some cows normally walk unevenly</p>	<p>Not normally affected, should easily maintain position in the herd.</p> 	<p>May have uneven stride and/or rhythm. Rear foot placement may miss front foot placement.</p> 	<p>May stand or walk unevenly but difficult to identify which leg/s are affected.</p> 	<p>Straight when standing, may be mildly arched when walking.</p> 	<p>May have slight bob and or may be held lower than normal.</p> 
<p><b>2</b> Lame</p> <p>Action required</p> <p>This cow is lame and needs to be reported, drafted and examined within 24 hours</p>	<p>May be slower than normal; may stop, especially when turning a corner.</p> 	<p>Shortened strides rear foot placement falls short of front foot placement.</p> 	<p>Uneven – lame leg can be identified.</p> 	<p>Often arched when standing and walking.</p> 	<p>Bobs up and down when walking.</p> 
<p><b>3</b> Very lame</p> <p>Urgent action required</p> <p>This cow is very lame and needs urgent attention. Draft and examine as soon as possible</p>	<p>Very slow, stops often and will lie down in paddock. Cannot keep up with the healthy herd.</p> 	<p>Shortened and very uneven. Non lame leg will swing through quickly.</p> 	<p>Lame leg easy to identify – ‘limping’; may barely stand on lame leg/s.</p> 	<p>Arched when standing and walking.</p> 	<p>Large head movements up and down when walking.</p> 





## Reference 2 – Body Condition Scores (BCS),

Body Condition Scoring 0-5, refer to [A national guide to describing and managing beef cattle in low body condition](#)

Body Condition Scoring 1-9, refer to images below, source: unknown.








Body Condition Scoring 1-9, description (source: Sprott and Herd)		Scores, relative to "Score Sheet for the assessment of wellbeing in cattle"
1	Severely emaciated – no fat observed, backbones, tail head and ribs are predominantly visible.	3
2	Emaciated – little visible muscle tissue, backbone, tail head and ribs less visible.	2
3	Very thin - no fat over ribs or brisket, backbone still easily visible (about 0.05 inches of fat cover).	1
4	Borderline – individual ribs noticeable, overall fat cover is lacking, there is increased musculature over shoulders and hindquarters, hips, and backbone slightly rounded (about 0.10 inches fat cover).	0
5	Moderate – increased fat cover over ribs, only 12 <sup>th</sup> and 13 <sup>th</sup> ribs visible, tail head full or flat but not rounded (about 0.20 inches fat cover)	0
6	Good – back, ribs and tail head slightly rounded and spongy when palpated, fat deposition in brisket (about 0.30 inches fat cover).	0
7	Fat – cow appears fleshy and carries fat on back, tail head and brisket, ribs are not visible, some udder fat (about 0.40 inches fat cover).	1
8	Very fat – squared appearance due to excess fat over back, tail head and hindquarters, fat deposition in brisket and along ribs and in udder (about 0.55 inches of fat cover).	1
9	Obese – fatter than BCS 8 with more fat in udder (about 0.70 inches f fat cover).	1



**Reference 3 – Faeces**, [image source: University of Kentucky, 2021](#) and [Farmers Weekly, 2016](#)

The following images grade faeces from most wet (1) to most dry (5). NOTE: the numbers here act as a guide and require interpretation to fit the “faeces” score, relative to “Score Sheet for the assessment of wellbeing in cattle”.

Faeces score, relative to “Score Sheet for the assessment of wellbeing in cattle”				
3 or 2	2	1	0	1
Faeces grade:				
1	2	3	4	5
				
Faeces are watery thin and not truly recognizable as faeces.	Faeces are thin custard-like; fecal structure can be recognized. At dropping they splash wide out on the floor.	Faeces are thick and custard-like. They make a light plopping sound when being dropped on the floor. They make a well-circumscribed pad that spreads and has the thickness of about 2 cm.	Stiff faeces are observed. They make a heavy plopping sound when being dropped. They make a well-circumscribed pad that piles in rings and spreads out very little.	Stiff faeces in balls, looks like horse feces. A boot sole profile is left when stepped on.

