

Welfare Issues in Beef Cattle

Physical wellbeing

Issue	Problem	Solution
Nutrition	Inadequate diet with a lack of fibre	Provide sufficient diet roughage (>60%)
Health monitoring	All health issues	Use herd Health Plan, frequent veterinary visits, monitor health & welfare performance, set targets, plan action to reduce incidence rates, independent audits. Daily health inspection/twice daily for vulnerable cattle
Water access	Access prevented by aggressive individuals	Provide multiple dispensers
Comfort	Fully-slatted floors cause injuries Thermal environment: Heat stress (>23°C) Weather exposure	Use entirely solid flooring with bedding material Provide good ventilation indoors. Choose breed suited to local environment. Provide shade and shelter in outdoor environment
Transport	Transport of unfit individuals Journey length Loading/Unloading	Inspect individuals before travel (ensure no injury/illness, able to stand on four legs, suitable body condition) Rear close to birth, slaughter at local facility. Short journey length (<4 hrs) including load/unloading. Body/head space in transit, water/food availability ventilation; high driving standard, avoid poor roads Non-slip ramp, gentle slope (<20°)

Mental wellbeing

Issue	Problem	Solution
Physical restriction	Inadequate space allowance Barren environments, eg. feedlots, provide insufficient space and no grazing or shelter	Calculate space based on bodyweight (min. 8m ² /500kg animal). Outdoor space (max. 2 cows per acre / low enough density to prevent ground damage) Provide pasture access with shelter and a low stocking density

Issue	Problem	Solution
Stockman relationship	Flighty behaviour due to fear of humans	Ensure interactions positive eg. calm, quiet handling, stroking. Staff trained in handling & keep records of training
Stable groups	Cattle form long-lasting complex affiliative groups	Keep cattle in stable groups, avoiding mixing social groups
	Male social isolation	Keep with other cattle, or related males in groups
Mutilations	Disbudding, dehorning and tail docking	Use polled breeds. Avoid routine mutilation; when necessary use anaesthesia, analgesia, performed by vet & low-stress restraint design
Weaning	Separation from dam	Use natural or two stage weaning
Handling	On-farm procedures and movement can cause stress	Positive training/habituation to novelty with feed/gentle handling – low-stress handling systems are recommended, eg. high-sided, curved races
	Poor handling during transport, lairage & slaughter causes stress and injury	Use efficient handling system to minimise stress & utilise natural behaviour for calm movement eg. use curved races; no contrasts in light/ distracting objects/ invasion of cows' flight zone/ electric goads
Transport	Stress, social mixing	Avoid mixing cattle from different social groups, minimise journey length (<8 hrs) including loading and unloading
Livestock Markets	Stress, extended transport	Avoid sale through markets
Slaughter	Inadequate stunning	Always perform effective pre-slaughter stun & monitor stunning efficiency
	Slaughter procedures	Minimise stun-slaughter interval (<60s), use chest/ thoracic stick. Ensure frequent independent audits, CCTV monitoring, staff training, trained animal welfare officer present to monitor every process

Natural behaviour

Issue	Problem	Solution
Restriction of species- specific behaviours	Lack of foraging, browsing, exercise, social behaviour, eg. grooming, sitting with preferred partners, avoiding aggressors; normal up/down movement, lateral lying, North-South orientation of lying	Access to pasture: all cattle kept at pasture during grazing season throughout life. If housing over winter is essential, provide access to outdoor exercise area, preferably pasture. Access to natural daylight through year
	Lack of indoor / outdoor choice	Allow free choice between indoors and outdoors
	Lack of space for functional areas indoors	Tie stalls < cubicles < straw yards < pasture. Sufficient space & loafing area preferably with pasture: allows synchronised lying & feeding
	Lack of maternal behaviour	Keep calf with dam until natural weaning
	Lack of entire body grooming	Provide brushes in housing, trees in pasture
	Lack of natural reproductive behaviours (for breeding beef cattle)	Use natural service instead of artificial insemination
Abnormal behaviours	Resulting from under/over stimulation: tongue rolling, repetitive licking/biting	Provide environmental stimulation, e.g. roughage forage, enrichment. Reduce stressors such as noise