



## OIE GUIDELINES FOR THE ON-FARM WELFARE OF CATTLE RAISED FOR BEEF

**SUBMISSION BY THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE\***

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### Introduction

The International Coalition for Animal Welfare (ICFAW) welcomes the decision by the OIE Animal Welfare Working Group to produce guidelines concerning the on-farm welfare of cattle raised for beef.

Of particular concern is the welfare of those cattle confined in intensive, industrial farming systems, or feedlots—typically barren enclosures that can confine anything from 1,000 to over 100,000 animals.<sup>1,2,3</sup> However, those raised in extensive farming systems are also subjected to several conditions and practices that can impair their welfare.

ICFAW submits the following recommendations to safeguard the welfare, including the health, of cattle raised for beef for consideration and inclusion by the OIE in its guidelines.

### Provisions for Management

Ensuring high welfare of cattle raised for beef is contingent on several factors, yet serious problems can arise in any system if sound management, good stockmanship, responsible husbandry, and appropriate care are lacking.

#### ***ICFAW recommendation on stockmanship:***

- As good management and stockmanship are critical to helping to provide for good animal welfare, personnel involved in handling and caring for cattle should be competent and receive appropriate training to equip them with the necessary practical skills and knowledge of cattle behaviour, health, and needs.

#### ***ICFAW recommendation on health care management:***

- All production units should have a contract with a veterinary surgeon trained and specialised in caring for cattle raised for beef, at all stages of life. At a minimum, animals should be overseen by the veterinary surgeon before and after each long transport event, and at least quarterly throughout the duration of their lives.

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\* The member organisations of the International Coalition for Animal Welfare, representing more than 12 million individual supporters internationally, include: Compassion in World Farming, Eurogroup for Animals, the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the Japanese Farm Animal Welfare Initiative, the National Council of SPCAs, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the World Society for the Protection of Animals.

- Each production unit should have a properly designed veterinary health plan developed with its veterinary surgeon, and, when appropriate, other experts. In this health plan, health and caretaking activities should be prescribed for the whole year production cycle, if animals are kept on-site for that duration, or for each phase of the animal's life (e.g., birth to weaning, backgrounding (a program instituted by some producers during which weaned calves may be permitted to forage and graze before they are confined in feedlots for finishing), and feedlotting). The plan should be evaluated and updated each year in consultation with the veterinary surgeon, and, when appropriate, other experts.
- Each production unit should keep detailed records of births, purchases, sales, mortalities, and use of medicines. Preventative and routine use of antibiotics should be prohibited.

***ICFAW recommendation on contingency planning:***

- Contingency plans should be in place for emergencies such as breakdown of equipment vital to the life of the animal (e.g., automated waterers, misters, feeders, ventilators), and a functioning emergency source of power should be available. Similar plans should be in place in case of disasters such as fire and flood.

***ICFAW recommendation on water and feed:***

- All cattle should have sufficient access at all time to adequate supplies of wholesome water.
- All cattle should be provided regular, daily, extensive pasture access for grazing.
- All cattle should have adequate quantities of wholesome food sufficient for their nutritional and behavioural needs, including a sufficient (at least 10%) daily amount of long fibre foodstuff to ensure normal rumen function.
- Palatable fibrous food such as silage, grass, and hay should be available ad libitum.
- As diets composed of greater than 50% cereal grains contribute to adverse health effects, grains, if given to cattle, should be introduced slowly and comprise no more than 50% of the daily diet.
- Foodstuff containing mammalian protein (except milk) should not be permitted.

***ICFAW recommendation on inspection of cattle:***

- Cattle should be inspected at least once daily. Ill or injured animals, animals not behaving normally, and pre parturient cows and heifers should be inspected more frequently. Calves should be inspected at least twice each day.
- During inspection special attention should be paid to body condition; activity; locomotion; condition of the skin, eyes, ears, tail, legs, feet, udder and external genitals; the presence of external parasites; the respiratory rate and depth; presence of coughing; condition of faecal droppings; and feed and water consumption.

**Provisions for Indoor and Outdoor Environment**

Understanding that cattle raised for beef are currently reared in diverse systems—from small outdoor herds in extensive, pasture-based ranches to high-density, barren feedlots—ICFAW believes that the beef production guidelines should encourage a shift to higher welfare farming that is not compatible with industrial feedlot production methods. Indeed, the well-being of cattle confined in feedlots is unacceptably low. As such, to ensure baseline levels of welfare, the feedlot production method should be phased out.

***ICFAW recommendation on outdoor cattle units:***

- Outdoor cattle units shall be planned only where climatic and other conditions, such as drainage, are suitable for their welfare.
- Whenever the condition of the weather and the state of the pastures allow, cattle should have ready access to well-managed pastureland. An exception could be made for non-castrated males over 1 year of age; they may be given regular, daily access to an exercise yard with environmental enrichment. Space allowances in exercise yards must be sufficient to allow the animals to move freely and engage in natural behaviour without competition.

- When outdoors, all cattle, including non-castrated males over 1 year of age, should have access to natural or artificial features to provide shelter and relief from adverse weather conditions (including strong winds and sun).
- All outdoor units should also have effective predator control.

***ICFAW recommendation on indoor cattle units:***

- The indoor space for cattle should allow them sufficient freedom of movement to be able to groom themselves without difficulty and sufficient room to freely stretch their limbs and to adopt species-specific postures when lying down, rising, resting, and sleeping. Space should be adequate so that all animals may engage in such behaviours simultaneously.
- Passageways and doorways should:
  - be wide enough to allow cattle to pass each other without difficulties,
  - be wide enough to allow free movement, and
  - not lead to a dead end.
- When indoors, all cattle should have access at all times to a dry lying area of solid construction that is bedded, sloped (but not more than 10%), and of a size to allow all animals to lie at the same time.
- Indoor accommodations should also provide a loafing (unbedded) area, which may be partly slatted or a non-slip solid flooring and must allow for all cattle to move freely in the area at the same time without competition.
- As serious claw and leg disorders can occur when cattle are confined on concrete and/or fully slatted flooring, ICF AW recommends that indoor accommodations should have non-slip flooring that allows for necessary grip.
- Cattle should not be tethered (except temporarily for medical interventions) or housed on fully slatted floors.
- Units using artificial lighting should allow for an uninterrupted dark period of eight consecutive hours within each 24-hour period.
- The indoor climate for cattle should be such that temperature, air velocity, humidity, the level of toxic gases, the dust level, and other atmospheric conditions do not adversely affect the welfare of the cattle. As a guide, cattle should not be exposed permanently to levels exceeding ammonia 20 ppm, carbon dioxide 3000 ppm, hydrogen sulphide 0.5 ppm. and dust (total suspended particles) 10 mg/m<sup>3</sup>.

***ICFAW recommendation on social grouping:***

- Groupings should not be mixed as aggression can increase during the establishment of new hierarchies,<sup>4</sup> and, for those production units with high stocking densities, individuals may suffer stress due to their inability to escape aggression.<sup>5</sup>

**Provisions for Calves**

In beef production, calves are typically raised by their mothers for their first six to seven months of life. During this period, serious welfare concerns that must be addressed include weaning method and mutilations, such as disbudding and dehorning, branding, and castration. An additional welfare concern is the calving process and its impact on dam and calf.

***ICFAW recommendation on weaning:***

- Weaning should be gradual to more closely mimic natural processes, wherein the relationship between the dam and calf can remain close for more than 14 months, especially if the cow has no other calves.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, when allowed to wean naturally, calves between 7-14 months of age<sup>7</sup> gradually incorporate grass and other forage into their diet as their mothers make getting milk more difficult<sup>8</sup> until the calves no longer suckle for food.<sup>9</sup>
- As such, early weaning at 2-3 months should be phased out to improve the welfare of both cow and calf.<sup>10</sup>
- At 6-7 months of age, calves should be weaned either via the fenceline or, preferably, the two-stage method to minimize stress in the animals. In the fenceline weaning management system, calves should be able to see, hear, and smell their dams. Fencing should be substantial enough to prevent

nursing, but not cause physical harm to either calf or cow. Ideally, cows and calves should be pastured together for a minimum of one week in the pasture where calves will be kept during the process, to enable them to become familiar with the new conditions and identify sources of water, before the cows are moved to the adjacent pasture. In the two-phase weaning method, calves may be fitted with a device that prevents them from sucking their dams, yet still allow for physical contact and eating and drinking. After removal of the devices after a week, calves may be separated from their dams.

***ICFAW recommendation on disbudding and dehorning:***

- When confined in enclosures such as yards and feedlots, and during transport, animals with horns may cause injuries and bruising as these conditions are often overcrowded and stress-inducing. To prevent these injuries and to facilitate easier handling of the animals, horned cattle should be kept in stable groups with enough space to escape aggression and avoid competition, thus helping to prevent injuries.
- Genetic options should be encouraged to obviate any purported need for disbudding and dehorning. As horns are a recessive trait, responsible breeding for polled (without horns) cattle should be prioritized as handling of polled cattle is easier and safer, and the animals are less likely to injure other cattle.<sup>11,12,13</sup>
- If disbudding and dehorning are permitted to occur, the animals should be afforded effective pain relief before and after the procedure, and the mutilations should be performed by a veterinary surgeon who administers a local anaesthetic prior to the surgery and systemic analgesia afterwards until wounds have healed completely. Horn removal should be performed by disbudding during the first five weeks of life or as soon as a prominent bud has formed. Dehorning of more mature cattle must not be carried out routinely as it causes severe pain and distress.<sup>14</sup>
- Chemical cauterisation should not be used because of the risk of excessive pain to treated animals.<sup>15</sup>
- Horned and dehorned cattle should not be mixed.

***ICFAW recommendation on branding:***

- Branding animals, whether hot-iron or freeze branding, is known to cause pain and stress. As there are other means to effectively mark and identify cattle, these mutilations should be prohibited. More humane alternatives include ear tags, electronic identification, a step counter, or a camera in the stable.
- If branding is permitted, which ICFW recommends against, hot-iron branding should be expressly prohibited.
- If permitted, which ICFW recommends against, freeze or cold branding should not be done on calves and should not be allowed on cattle's faces. The mutilation should only be performed by competent, trained persons and pain relief before and after the procedure should be administered.

***ICFAW recommendation on castration:***

- The three most common castration methods—removing the testicles surgically or causing irreparable damage by use of a clamp to crush the spermatic cords (the Burdizzo method) or a rubber ring to constrict the scrotal blood supply—are known to cause pain to calves, both at the time the mutilation is performed and in the hours and days following.<sup>16</sup> As such, local anaesthesia and pain relief before and after the procedure should be administered.
- In six-month-old calves, cortisol measurements suggest that rubber ring castration is most painful, surgery intermediate, and the Burdizzo method least painful.<sup>17</sup> The Burdizzo method also apparently produced the least pain in younger calves.<sup>18</sup> ICFW recommends against permitting rubber ring castration.
- Although ICFW recommends that feedlot production be prohibited on welfare grounds, should they be permitted during a phase-out period, castrating calves on arrival to the feedlot should be expressly prohibited as it can decrease their average daily gain and cause increased morbidity.<sup>19</sup> Compared to calves castrated before entering the feedlot, calves castrated at the feedlot may suffer a 92% increase in morbidity and a 3.5% increase in mortality.<sup>20</sup>

### **ICFAW recommendation on calving:**

- Selection for rapid growth within the beef industry can lead to heavy calves and difficulties during calving. As well, breeding schemes have resulted in some animals with a genetic defect leading to double-muscled hind quarters that typically requires Caesarean delivery.
- Easy calving qualities should be promoted in beef breeds. Homozygous double-muscled animals should not be used in beef production.

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<sup>1</sup> Perry TW. 1992. Feedlot fattening in North America in Beef cattle production. In: Jarriage R and Beranger G (eds.), Beef Cattle Production, World Animal Science C 5, (New York, NY: Elsevier, pp. 289-307).

<sup>2</sup> SCAHAW. 2001. The welfare of cattle kept for beef production.

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54_en.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Edwards A. 1996. Respiratory diseases of feedlot cattle in central USA. The Bovine Practitioner 30:5-7.

<sup>4</sup> SCAHAW. 2001. The welfare of cattle kept for beef production.

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54_en.pdf). citing: Bouissou et al., 2001.

<sup>5</sup> SCAHAW. 2001. The welfare of cattle kept for beef production.

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54_en.pdf). citing: Arave et al., 1974.

<sup>6</sup> SCAHAW. 2001. The welfare of cattle kept for beef production.

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54_en.pdf). citing: Le Neindre, 1989a.

<sup>7</sup> Haley DB. 2006. The behavioural response of cattle (*Bos Taurus*) to artificial weaning in two stages. Ph.D. thesis, University of Saskatchewan.

<sup>8</sup> SCAHAW. 2001. The welfare of cattle kept for beef production.

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<sup>9</sup> Haley DB. 2006. The behavioural response of cattle (*Bos Taurus*) to artificial weaning in two stages. Ph.D. thesis, University of Saskatchewan.

<sup>10</sup> SCAHAW. 2001. The welfare of cattle kept for beef production.

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54_en.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Prayaga KC. 2007. Genetic options to replace dehorning in beef cattle-a review. Australian Journal of Agricultural Research 58:1-8.

<sup>12</sup> Stafford KJ and Mellor DJ. 2005. Dehorning and disbudding distress and its alleviation in calves. The Veterinary Journal 169:337-49.

<sup>13</sup> Goodrich R and Stricklin WR. 1997. Animal welfare issues: Beef. In: Reynnells RD and Eastwood BR, Animal Welfare Issues Compendium, U.S. Department of Agriculture website. [www.nalusda.gov/awic/pubs/97issues.htm](http://www.nalusda.gov/awic/pubs/97issues.htm).

<sup>14</sup> SCAHAW. 2001. The welfare of cattle kept for beef production.

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54_en.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> UK Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. Report of Working Party Established by RCVS Council to consider the mutilation of animals. 1987. Annex k of Guide to Professional Conduct, Part 3.

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<sup>16</sup> Stafford KJ and Mellor DJ. 2005. The welfare significance of the castration of cattle: a review. New Zealand Veterinary Journal 53(5):271-8.

<sup>17</sup> SCAHAW. 2001. The welfare of cattle kept for beef production.

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<sup>18</sup> SCAHAW. 2001. The welfare of cattle kept for beef production.

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fs/sc/scah/out54_en.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Thomson DU and White BJ. 2006. Backgrounding beef cattle. Veterinary Clinics of North America, Food Animal Practice 22:373-98..

<sup>20</sup> Duff GC and Galyean ML. 2007. Recent advances in management of highly stressed, newly received feedlot cattle. Journal of Animal Science 85:823-40. citing Daniels et al. (2000)