



Recommendations for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle

(Adopted by NCBA's Beef Quality Assurance Advisory Board and Cattle Health & Well being Committee)

Producer Code of Cattle Care

Beef cattle producers take pride in their responsibility to provide proper care to cattle on their farms and ranches. The following are general recommendations for producers to consider in raising and handling cattle:

- Provide adequate food, water and care to protect the health and well-being of animals.
- Provide disease prevention practices to protect herd health, including access to veterinary care.
- Provide facilities that allow safe, humane, and efficient movement and/or restraint of livestock.
- Use humane methods to euthanize sick or injured livestock and dispose of them properly.
- Provide personnel with training to properly handle and care for cattle.
- Make timely observations of livestock to ensure basic needs are being met.
- Provide transportation that avoids undue stress caused by overcrowding, excess time in transit, or improper handling during loading and unloading.
- Keep updated on advancements and changes in the industry to make decisions based on sound production practices and consideration to animal well-being
- Persons who willfully mistreat animals will not be tolerated.

Introduction

Cattlemen have long recognized the need to properly care for their livestock. Sound animal husbandry practices – based on research and decades of practical experience – are known to impact the well-being of cattle, individual animal health and herd productivity.

Cattle are produced using a variety of management systems, in very diverse environmental and geographic locations in the United States. As such, there is not one specific set of production practices that can be recommended for all cattle producers to

implement. Personal experience, training, and professional judgement are key factors in providing proper animal care.

Feeding and Nutrition

Cattle should have access to an adequate quantity and quality of nutrients (feed, water, minerals and vitamins).

The nutrient requirements of cattle vary according to age, sex, weight, body condition, stage of production and environmental temperature. The National Research Council has developed guidelines describing these requirements. Nutritionists are an excellent resource and can provide specific information on the nutrient needs of cattle, nutrient availability in feed ingredients, and suggest diets based on regional differences in nutrient values of available feedstuffs.

Adequate feed quantity and quality is required for body maintenance and growth. However, cattle adapt to periodic over or under availability of feedstuffs.

Cattle should have access to an adequate supply of clean water. Although water requirements vary greatly, as a rule of thumb, water consumption will range from 1 gal per 100 lb. of body weight during cold weather, to nearly 2 gal per 100 lb. of body weight during hot weather.

Livestock Facilities

Facilities (fences, chutes, etc.) should be maintained in good working condition to provide efficient movement and reduce stress when working cattle. Sharp objects and protrusions can result in bruise damage and should be avoided whenever possible.

Equipment to restrain cattle is generally needed on most beef cattle operations. This equipment should allow for quick and secure restraint in order to minimize stress or injury to the animal or the operator. The equipment should allow for the quick release of the animal upon completion of the procedure. Experienced and trained personnel should operate restraining equipment.

Shelter

Beef cattle are produced in a variety of production settings, from pasture and range, to dry lot and confinement facilities. Moreover, cattle are adaptable to a wide range of natural conditions and artificial environments. When behavioral and physiological characteristics or cattle are matched to local conditions, beef cattle thrive in virtually any environment in the U.S. without artificial shelter. However, during extreme weather conditions, cattle should have access to well-drained resting areas and/or to natural or constructed shelter.

Animal Health Practices

Producers should implement herd health programs that address the prevention and treatment of disease. These programs will vary depending upon the type of operation and diseases prevalence in a particular region of the U.S. Cattle producers are

encouraged to consult with their veterinarian to establish effective herd health programs.

Cattle should be observed regularly, particularly during critical periods of the year such as calving season, or weather related events.

Procedures such as vaccination, castration, dehorning and branding are often performed by producers. Proper techniques and equipment should be utilized. Only experienced or properly trained personnel should perform these procedures.

Beef cattle producers are encouraged to follow state or national Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) guidelines. National BQA guidelines can be obtained from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

Handling Sick, Disabled or Deceased Livestock

It is the responsibility of cattlemen to humanely care for their animals and make every effort to obtain veterinary care for animals that are sick or injured. Livestock that are sick or injured and non-responsive to medical treatment for a reasonable period of convalescence should be humanely euthanized on the farm or ranch. Moreover, cattle exhibiting symptoms of advanced disease (such as cattle that are severely emaciated), cattle that are non-ambulatory, or cattle with advanced stages of ocular neoplasia should **not** be transported to market facilities. Cattle that are disabled or become injured during transportation should be euthanized or humanely transported to a processing facility.

Euthanasia is defined as a humane death occurring without pain and suffering. It is inevitable that cattle will become sick or injured to the degree that euthanasia will be required. Sick or injured cattle that will not respond to treatment should be euthanized. Techniques for euthanasia should follow guidelines established by the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Bovine Practitioners. Detailed information on proper euthanasia techniques is available in the guide titled "Practical Euthanasia of Cattle" or producers may consult with their veterinarian concerning appropriate techniques.

Producers should use proper methods of disposing of deceased livestock in accordance with federal, state and local regulations. If utilizing a rendering service, keep deceased livestock in a screened area away from public view.

Transportation

The movement of cattle to and from farms, ranches, feedlots and marketing facilities is an important aspect of beef cattle production. Proper handling and transportation are important for the safety and welfare of the animals being moved. When loading and unloading cattle, personnel should move cattle as quietly and patiently as possible to prevent stress or injury.

Cattle should be separated by size or gender prior to shipping, and if possible, different groups loaded into separate compartments of the truck or trailer. To prevent livestock from falling while in transit, the ride should be as smooth as possible. Drivers should

avoid sudden starts/stops and sharp turns. Moreover, the floors of trucks and trailers should be clean and slip resistant. While in transit, occasional stops should be made to ensure that cattle are well dispersed and still standing. Severe weather conditions must be considered when transporting livestock. As appropriate, adequate ventilation and protection should be provided during transit.

Further information on transporting cattle may be found in the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service publication, *Cattle and Swine Trucking Guide for Exporters* published May 1997.

Training & Education

All individuals working with livestock should be provided a sound working knowledge of proper care and handling techniques. Cattle producers should observe their employees to ensure that they are properly trained. Never assume that anyone can properly handle cattle, nor that they will always utilize proper techniques. Ongoing education should be a part of any management plan.

Education materials on basic livestock handling techniques, including the proper handling of disabled cattle are available from the Livestock Conservation Institute (LCI). Those materials include the following:

- *Cattle Handling and Transportation (video)*
- *Livestock Handling Guide (pamphlet)*
- *Livestock Trucking Guide (pamphlet)*
- *Proper Handling Techniques for Non-Ambulatory Animals (pamphlet)*
- *Practical Euthanasia of Cattle (guide book)*

Employees working with cattle should understand the concept of working from an animal's flight zone. The size of the flight zone is determined by the previous experience of the animal and its temperament.

When working with cattle, individuals should avoid sudden movement, loud noises, or other actions that may frighten animals. Handling devices should be used humanely. This includes the use of persuasion devices such as canes, prods, sorting sticks and paddles.

Summary

The beef industry is often challenged to maintain a proactive position on issues of concern to individuals or special interest groups with little or no knowledge of animal agriculture. Years of practical experience have shaped the practices that provide humane care of livestock. Cattlemen are encouraged to view these guidelines as broad recommendations for the care and handling of cattle. Cattle producers wanting more specific information about proper care and handling of livestock should contact the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.