



STOCKER AND BACKGROUNDING SELF ASSESSMENT



**A SAFE, WHOLESOME AND
HEALTHY BEEF SUPPLY**

THE STOCKER AND BACKGROUNDING INDUSTRY'S GUIDELINES FOR THE CARE AND HANDLING OF CATTLE

Introduction

Cattlemen in stocker operations have long recognized the need to properly care for livestock. Sound animal husbandry practices, based on decades of practical experience and research, are known to impact the well-being of stocker cattle, individual animal health and herd productivity. Stocker cattle operations are located in many diverse environments and geographic locations in the United States. A universal set of production practices can not be recommended for all stocker cattle producers in light of the divergent climate and geographic variations of the stocker and backgrounding segment. Personal experience, training and professional judgment can serve as a valuable resource for providing proper animal care.

Producer Code of Cattle Care

Beef cattle producers take pride in their responsibility to provide proper care for cattle. The Code of Cattle Care below lists foundational recommendations for care and handling of cattle:

- Provide necessary feed, 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 cattle.
- Use appropriate methods to humanely euthanize terminally sick or injured livestock and dispose of them properly.
- Provide personnel with training/experience to properly handle and care for cattle.
- Make timely observations of cattle to ensure basic needs are being met.
- Minimize stress when transporting cattle.
- Keep updated on advancements and changes in the industry to make decisions based upon sound production practices and consideration for animal well-being.
- Persons who willfully mistreat animals will not be tolerated.

Biosecurity and disease prevention

Biosecurity is defined as a set of measures designed to protect a herd from the entry of infectious agents, diseases, toxins, or problems. Biosecurity programs should be implemented, commensurate with the risk of disease and in accordance with relevant recommendations found in Terrestrial Code chapters on OIE listed diseases.

Stocker and backgrounding cattle health management

Like other species, cattle are susceptible to infectious diseases, metabolic disorders, toxins, parasites, neoplasia and injury. Control programs should be based on risk assessment. Economic losses are reduced by early intervention through health management programs.

- The producer must have a veterinary/client/patient relationship (VCPR) to create preventative medicine and therapy protocols for stocker cattle.
- Stockmen should also work with a nutritionist to determine the diet for their cattle.
- Producers and their employees should have the ability to recognize common health problems and know how to properly utilize animal health products and other control measures.
- When prevention or control measures are ineffective, the producer should promptly contact a veterinarian for a diagnosis and treatment program to reduce animal suffering and animal losses.

Animal health management is a means to prevent diseases and other problems from occurring in cattle herds and to provide appropriate treatments for animals when disease occurs. There should be an effective program for the prevention and treatment of diseases, consistent with the programs established by the attending veterinarian.

Those responsible for the care of cattle should be aware of the signs of ill-health, such as reduced feed and water intake, weight gain and body condition, changes in behaviour or abnormal physical appearance.

Cattle at higher risk of disease require more frequent inspection by stockmen. If stockmen are not able to determine the causes of ill-health/distress or to correct these, or if they suspect the presence of a listed reportable disease, they should seek advice from those having training and experience, such as bovine veterinarians or other qualified advisers. Veterinary processing and treatment protocols should be prescribed by a licensed veterinarian. Vaccinations and other treatments administered to cattle should be performed by people skilled in the procedures and on the basis of veterinary or other expert advice. Stockmen should have training in caring for downer cattle. They should also have training in managing chronically ill and injured animals. Euthanasia of non-responding cattle should be accomplished as soon as recovery is deemed not to be possible (AABP, 1999; AVMA, 2007).

Thermal environment

Although cattle can adapt to a wide range of environmental conditions, sudden fluctuations in weather may cause heat or cold stress.

Heat stress

The thermal heat index (THI) is influenced by air temperature, relative humidity and wind speed. As the THI increases, the risk of hyperthermia increases. Cattle that have been fed for a longer period and are fatter are more susceptible to heat stress.

Stockmen should be aware of the critical THI threshold for their animals. When the THI is expected to reach this threshold routine, daily husbandry activities that include cattle movement should be adjusted accordingly. As the THI moves into emergency levels, stockmen should institute an emergency action plan that could include the provision of shade and drinking water, or sprinkling water to penetrate the hair coat of affected cattle.

Cold stress

Protection from wind and rain should be provided where possible, particularly for young stock that are outdoors for the first time. Protection could be provided by natural or man-made structures.

Stockmen should ensure that cattle have access to adequate feed and water during cold stress. At times of extreme weather conditions, such as heavy snow falls or blizzards, stockmen should institute an emergency action plan to provide cattle with shelter, feed and water.

Feeding and Nutrition

Diets for all classes of stocker cattle should meet the recommendations of the National Research Council (NRC) and/or recommendations of a nutritionist.

- Cattle must have access to an adequate water supply. Estimated water requirements for all classes of beef cattle in various production settings are described in the NRC Nutrient Requirements of Beef Cattle.
- Provide adequate feed. Avoid feed and water interruption extending longer than 24 hours.
- Feedstuffs and feed ingredients should be of satisfactory quality to meet nutritional needs.
- Under certain circumstances (e.g., droughts, frosts, and floods), feedstuffs or other dietary components should be tested to determine the presence of substances that can be detrimental to cattle well-being, such as nitrate, prussic acid, mycotoxins, etc.
- Producers should become familiar with potential micronutrient deficiencies or excesses in their respective geographical areas and use appropriately formulated supplements or rations.
- Use only USDA, FDA and EPA approved feed products for cattle. These products must be used in accordance with the approved product use guidelines.

Feeding Guidelines for Stocker Cattle

Stocker cattle are raised on a wide variety of forage resources (native pasture, annuals, improved pasture) with minimal additional nutrient supplementation beyond normal salt and mineral provisions.

- On growing forages, stocking rates should be established that meet production goals for growth and performance.
- On dormant pastures, supplement cattle as needed to meet maintenance or growth requirements for the animal's weight, breed, and age as established by NRC guidelines and targeted production goals of the operation.
- Stockmen should have adequate knowledge of the appropriate body condition score for their cattle and should not allow body condition score to drop below critical thresholds. In times of severe drought, early interventions should be utilized to minimize loss of productivity.
- Where appropriate, beef producers may consult a nutritionist (private consultant, university or feed company nutritionist, or veterinarian) for advice on ration formulation and feeding programs. Also the use of soil scientists, range/pasture management specialists and other technical service providers should be utilized as much as possible.

Stocking density

Inappropriately high stocking densities may have an adverse effect on animal well-being. Indicators may include growth rate, feed efficiency, digestive health upset, BRD morbidity, mortality and behaviour. In extensive systems, stocking density should be managed to ensure an adequate feed supply for the cattle.

Husbandry procedures associated with pain

Surgical husbandry practices that have the potential to cause pain are practiced on cattle for reasons of production efficiency, animal health and well-being and human safety. Where possible, these procedures should be performed in such a way as to minimize any pain and stress on the animal, including the performance of the procedure at as early an age as possible and/or the use of anaesthesia and/or analgesia.

Castration

Castration of beef cattle is performed in many production systems to reduce aggression and sexual behaviour, improve human safety, remove the risk of unwanted pregnancies in the herd, and enhance production efficiency by producing beef that better meets consumers needs and wants.

Where it is necessary to castrate beef cattle, producers should seek guidance from veterinarians as to the optimum method and timing for their type of cattle and production system.

Methods of castration used in beef cattle include surgical (knife) removal of the testes, bloodless methods (banding), and crushing of the spermatic cord (burdizzo).

Producers should seek guidance from veterinarians on the availability and advisability of analgesia/ anaesthesia for castration of beef cattle. Operators performing castration of beef cattle should be trained and competent in the procedure used and be able to recognize the signs of post-procedure complications.

Dehorning

Horned beef cattle are commonly dehorned in order to reduce animal injuries and hide damage, improve human safety, and facilitate transport and handling. Where it is necessary to dehorn beef cattle, producers should seek guidance from veterinarians as to the optimum method and timing for their type of cattle and production system. Operators performing dehorning of beef cattle should be trained and demonstrate competence in the procedures used and be able to recognize the signs of post-procedure complications.

Identification

Ear-tagging, ear-notching, tattooing, freeze branding and the use of radio frequency identification devices (RFID) are methods used to permanently identify beef cattle and are not considered to compromise animal well-being. In some situations, hot iron branding may be required or may be the only practical method of permanent identification of beef cattle. Hot branding of cattle should be done by experienced operators and should be performed quickly and with appropriate equipment and with adequate restraint.

Cattle handling

- Abuse of cattle is not acceptable under any circumstances.
- Where beef cattle from stocker and backgrounding systems are herded or otherwise managed in a handling facility, they should be moved quietly. Weather conditions should be taken into account and cattle should not be herded under extremely hot or cold conditions. Cattle should never be driven to the point of collapse.
- Handlers should take advantage of cattle's working zone and point of balance to effectively move them. For safety and well-being reasons, minimize the use of electric prods. Non-electric driving aids, such as plastic paddles, sorting sticks, flags or streamers (affixed to long handles) should be used to quietly guide and turn animals. When cattle continuously balk, cattle handlers should investigate and correct the reason.
- Under desirable conditions, ninety percent or more of cattle should flow through cattle handling facilities without the use of electric prods.
- When cattle prods must be used, avoid contact with the eyes, rectum, genitalia and udder.
- Some cattle are naturally more prone to vocalize, but if more than 5% of cattle vocalize (after being restrained but prior to procedures being performed) it may be an indication that chute operation should be evaluated.
- If more than 25% of cattle jump or run out of the chute, there should be a review of the situation, and questions asked such as:
 - is this a result of cattle temperament
 - prior handling issues
 - was the chute operating properlyEvaluate procedures to determine if cattle handling practices need to be improved.
- Properly trained dogs can be effective and humane tools for cattle handling. Insure that rough handling and barking is minimized and impeding cattle flow is eliminated.

Location, construction and equipment of farms

All facilities for beef cattle should be constructed, maintained and operated to minimize the risk to the well-being of the animals and human safety. Equipment for handling and restraining beef cattle should only be used in a way that minimizes the risk of injury, pain or distress. Handling alleys and housing pens must be free of sharp edges and protrusions to prevent injury to animals and handlers.

Alleys and gates should be designed and operated to avoid impeding cattle movement. Slippery surfaces should be avoided, especially where cattle enter a single file alley leading to a chute and where they exit the chute. Grooved concrete, metal grating (not sharp), rubber mats or deep sand can be used to minimize slipping and falling. Quiet handling is essential to minimize slipping. Stockmen should try to avoid excessive noise when operating gates and catches as this may stress the animals.

Hydraulic and manual restraining chutes should be adjusted as appropriate to the size of cattle being handled. Working parts should be regularly cleaned and maintained to ensure the system functions properly and is safe for the cattle and handlers.

Stocker cattle can be placed in pastures or fields that are quite large. Moving animals to a hospital facility verses applying veterinary treatments in the field may be detrimental to the animal's well-being. At these times, it would be appropriate for stockmen to capture the cattle in the pasture with a rope. Cattle should be roped and restrained in a quiet and quick manner. Excessive running of cattle is not recommended. Roping and restraining of cattle in the pasture or the field should be done by trained personnel.

Training and Education for Maintaining and Improving Cattle Care and Handling Implementation and Review Programs

Management practices should be informally assessed every day to ensure that animal well-being is not compromised. All people responsible for beef cattle should be competent according to their responsibilities and should understand cattle husbandry, behaviour, biosecurity, general signs of disease, and indicators of poor animal well-being such as stress, pain and discomfort, and how to alleviate the situation. Competence may be gained through formal training coupled with practical experience.

Gaining competency can be accomplished by:

- Establishing a network of resources on cattle care
- Following the Cattle Care and Handling Guidelines
- Keeping track of training and education activities
- Conducting self-audits of animal care and handling procedures

Training of those who handle cattle should include:

- An understanding of the animal's point of balance and working zone
- Avoiding sudden movement, loud noises or other actions that may frighten cattle
- Proper handling of aggressive/easily excited cattle to ensure the well-being of the cattle and people
- Proper use of handling and restraining devices
- Recognizing early signs of distress and disease
- Proper diagnosis of common illnesses followed by appropriate care
- Administration of animal health products and how to perform routine animal health procedures
- Recognizing signs associated with extreme weather stress and how to respond appropriately
- Basic feeding/nutritional management of beef cattle

Emergency plans

Beef producers should have contingency plans to cover the failure of power, water and feed supply. Depending on the circumstances and the farming or ranching system, contingency plans may address fail-safe alarm devices to detect malfunctions, back up generators, access to maintenance (technicians) providers, ability to store water on the farm, access to water cartage services, adequate on farm storage of feed and alternative sources of feed.

As appropriate to the circumstances and the operation, contingency plans should be in place to minimize and mitigate the effects of natural disasters or extreme climatic conditions e.g., heat stress, drought, blizzards and flooding. Emergency plans should also address the management of the farm in the face of an emergency disease outbreak, consistent with national programs and recommendations of Veterinary Services as appropriate.

Loading, unloading and transporting stocker and backgrounding cattle

- Cattle sorting and holding pens should allow handling without undue stress, be located near the loading/unloading facility and be suitable for the size/scale of the operation.
- Provide properly designed and maintained loading facilities for humane and safe animal movement. Proper design of loading chutes as well as personnel that are knowledgeable of their proper use can assure the safety of both cattle and cattle handlers. Ramps and chutes should be well built, provide non-slip footing, and have sides high enough to keep cattle from falling or jumping off. A ramp angle of 25 degrees or less is recommended.
- All vehicles used to transport cattle should provide for the safety of personnel and cattle during loading, transporting and unloading.
- Strictly adhere to safe load levels with regard to animal weight and space allocation.
- Producers hauling cattle in farm and ranch trailers must ensure that adequate space is provided so that cattle have sufficient room to stand with little risk of being forced down because of overcrowding.
- Cattle that are unable to withstand transportation should not be shipped.
- When the vehicle is not full, safely partition cattle into smaller areas to provide load stability for the cattle and the vehicle.
- Knowingly inflicting physical injury or unnecessary pain on cattle when loading, unloading or transporting animals is unacceptable.
- No gap which would allow injury to an animal should exist between the ramp, its sides, flooring, and the vehicle.
- Vehicle doors and internal gates should be sufficiently wide to permit cattle to pass through easily without bruising or injury.
- Cattle should be loaded, unloaded, and moved through facilities with patience and as quietly as possible to reduce stress and injury.

Downed animals and humane euthanasia

When dealing with animals that are injured or diseased, a prompt diagnosis should be made to determine whether the animal should be humanely killed or should receive intervention care.

Stockmen should provide feed and water to non-ambulatory cattle daily.

Non-ambulatory cattle should be moved very carefully. Dragging non-ambulatory beef cattle is unacceptable. Cattle should not be lifted with chains onto transportation conveyances. Acceptable methods of transporting non-ambulatory animals include a sled, low-boy trailer or properly secured in the bucket of a loader.

When treatment is attempted, cattle that are unable to sit up unaided and refuse to eat or drink should be humanely euthanized as soon as recovery is deemed not possible. Cattle that are non-ambulatory should never be sent to a livestock market or to a processing facility.

Euthanasia should be performed in a humane manner to avoid pain and suffering (AABP, 1999; AVMA, 2007). The decision to euthanasia an animal and the procedure itself should be undertaken by a competent person. Reasons for euthanasia may include:

- Severe emaciation, weak cattle that are non-ambulatory or at risk of becoming downers
- Non-ambulatory cattle that will not sit up, refuse to eat or drink, or have not responded to therapy
- Rapid deterioration of a medical condition for which therapy has been unsuccessful
- Severe, debilitating pain
- Compound (open) fracture
- Spinal injury
- Central nervous system disease
- Multiple joint infections with chronic weight loss

Carcass Disposal

Carcass disposal for dead cattle is an important and legal consideration in any stocker and backgrounding operation. Generally there are four methods for disposing of dead cattle: rendering, composting, burying and incinerating. Federal and state regulations concerning the disposal and handling of the carcasses from deceased animals should be reviewed as they vary from state to state. It is important to understand traffic flow around your stocker operation. Creating a blind or placing mortalities away from the road should be considered.



BQA Stocker and Backgrounder Assessment

Operation Name: _____ Location: _____

Date: _____ Operation contact Name/Phone: _____

Assessor Name/Phone: _____

Category Point	Measure	Acceptable/Yes	Requires Action*	Unacceptable/No*	Not Applicable
ADMIN					
Abuse/Neglect	<p>Willful abuse is defined as acts outside of normally accepted production practices that intentionally cause pain, injury or suffering including, but not limited to: Intentionally applying any type of driving aid to a sensitive part of the animal including, but not limited to: eye, ear, nose, rectum or genitalia Malicious hitting or beating of an animal Movement of non-ambulatory cattle in a manner inconsistent with BQA recommendations</p> <p>If no abuse was witnessed mark Acceptable/Yes. If not, make an appropriate mark and fill out the comments section.</p>				
	Animal Abuse	No animal abuse was observed during assessment.			
	Comments:				
Abuse/Neglect	<p>Animal neglect is defined as purposely not providing adequate amounts of feed, water or other necessary care, which results in significant harm or death of an animal. If an adequate amount of feed, water or other necessary care was provided mark Acceptable/Yes. If not, make an appropriate mark and fill out the comments section.</p>				
	Animal Neglect	Feed, water and other necessary care was available during assessment.			
	Comments:				
Withdrawal/Residue Avoidance	<p>Management techniques must be in place, and are currently being utilized, to prevent cattle that have been treated from being marketed until the withdrawal time has been completed and there is no risk of an animal being marketed with a violative residue level. If management techniques to avoid violative residue are in place and are being utilized mark Acceptable/Yes. If not, make an appropriate mark and fill out the comments section.</p>				
	Residue Avoidance	Provisions are in place to monitor withdrawal times and prevent cattle with potentially violative residue from being marketed.			
	Comments:				

Category Point	Measure	Acceptable/Yes	Requires Action*	Unacceptable/No*	Not Applicable	
Protocols/Records	<p>Protocols, procedures or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) must be provided and documented for the following category points, and when specifics are described that protocol must contain each of the item(s) noted within the measure.</p> <p>If the measure is fully met mark Acceptable/Yes. If not, make an appropriate mark and fill out the comments section.</p>					
	Training	Is a documented training program in place that includes: Animal handling, animal restraint, castration, dehorning, stockmanship, sick animal management, medication and treatment, and residue avoidance?				
	Euthanasia	Is there a documented euthanasia protocol in place that meets AABP guidelines?				
	Non-ambulatory Cattle	Are documented protocols in place for dealing with non-ambulatory cattle?				
	Health	Are documented health protocols in place that address disease prevention, management and treatment?				
	Carcass Disposal	Is there a documented animal disposal protocol in place that meets federal, state and local disposal regulations?				
	Broken Needles	Is there a documented broken needle protocol?				
	Stocking Density	Is a documented protocol in place to determine adequate stocking density to maintain cattle's plane of nutrition for growth and health?				
	Comments:					
Protocols/Records	<p>Protocols or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) must be provided and documented for the following category points, and when specifics are described that protocol must contain each of the item(s) noted within the measure.</p> <p>If the measure is fully met mark Acceptable/Yes. If not, make an appropriate mark and fill out the comments section.</p>					
	Receiving/Processing	Is a documented protocol available for receiving/processing cattle including.				
	Emergency Action Plan (EAP)	Is an Emergency Action Plan readily accessible?				
	Veterinary/Client/ Patient Relationship (VCPR)	Is there documentation of a VCPR? Documentation may be items such as: visit reports, billing records, etc.				
Comments:						

Category Point	Measure	Acceptable/Yes	Requires Action*	Unacceptable/No*	Not Applicable
WATER					
Water access / cleanliness	Adequate and clean water supply (i.e. no long term build-up of manure, algae, etc.)				
Comments:					
MAINTENANCE					
<p>The loading/unloading area should be well-maintained, have non-slip footing and be free of potentially harmful items.</p> <p>If the unloading area meets the above criteria mark Acceptable/Yes. If not, mark Unacceptable/No and complete the comments section.</p>					
Loading/unloading area	Well-maintained, non-slip footing, no broken gates/fencing/ etc.				
Comments:					
<p>The processing area should be well-maintained, have non-slip footing and be free of distractions and potentially harmful items.</p> <p>If the processing area meets the above criteria mark Acceptable/Yes. If not, mark Unacceptable/No and complete the comments section.</p>					
Processing area	Well-maintained, non-slip footing, no broken gates/fencing/ etc.				
Comments:					
<p>Euthanasia equipment should be maintained in good repair and available to trained personnel at all times or ready access should be available to veterinary services.</p> <p>If euthanasia equipment is in good repair and accessible, or veterinary access is readily available, mark Acceptable/Yes. If not, mark Unacceptable/No and complete the comments section.</p>					
Euthanasia area	Is euthanasia equipment available and in good repair, or veterinary access is readily available?				
Comments:					

