

*Code of Practice  
for the Welfare of  
Dairy Cattle*

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## **Introduction**

This code is based on the knowledge and technology available at the time of publication and may need to be changed in the light of future knowledge. It does not replace the need for experience and common sense in the husbandry of animals.

This code is based on the belief that cattle should be afforded the five freedoms of Webster, namely:

- **Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition**
- **Freedom from discomfort**
- **Freedom from pain, injury or disease**
- **Freedom to express normal behaviour**
- **Freedom from fear and distress**

A high degree of caring and responsible management and stockmanship is vital to ensure good animal welfare. Managers and stockmen must be thoroughly trained, skilled and competent in animal husbandry and welfare, and have a good working knowledge of their system and the livestock under their care.

## **1. FOOD AND WATER**

- 1.1 Animals must be fed an appropriate and wholesome diet, which is fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health and satisfy their nutritional needs.
- 1.2 Feed shall be fresh and available at all times.
- 1.3 Animals must be provided with fibre to allow them to ruminate, which must be of such quality and length as to help avoid acidosis.
- 1.4 Efforts must be made to avoid sudden changes in the type of food.
- 1.5 Animals must be provided with continuous access to an adequate supply of clean, fresh drinking water each day.
- 1.6 Feed and water troughs must be cleaned regularly, at least once a week, or more often if necessary.
- 1.7 Feed and water troughs must be of an appropriate height to facilitate ease of use.
- 1.8 Suitable measures must be taken to ensure that the area around the water and feed troughs is not muddy or unhygienic.
- 1.9 It is strongly recommended that feed and water troughs are placed under shelter, to encourage consumption and reduce spoiling of the contents.
- 1.10 The size and position of troughs must be such that aggression and competition is minimised or eradicated. In cases where horned animals are kept, extra space will be required to accommodate their horns.

## **2. CALVES – FOOD AND WATER**

- 2.1 It is vital that every new calf receives adequate colostrum from its dam, or from another newly calved cow, as soon as possible after it is born and certainly within the first six hours of its life; it must continue to suckle for a full 24 hours.

- 2.2 When suckling is not possible, approximately 4-6 litres of colostrum must be administered by stomach tube over the first 24 hours (1.5lit in 4 feeds). For a further 48 hours calves must receive approx 4-6 litres of colostrum/whole milk daily in at least two feeds.
- 2.3 Calves need liquid food daily for at least the first 6 weeks of life, until they are eating one kg per day of calf starter pellets. From the end of the second week they should also have access to water and dry feeds.
- 2.4 Calves must be fed on a wholesome diet appropriate to their age, weight, and behavioural and physiological needs, fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health and to promote a positive state of well-being.
- 2.5 If a teat system of feeding is used, teats must be arranged so that a calf's neck is positioned at least horizontally or with a slight upward tilt.
- 2.6 If bucket fed, each calf should have access to an individual bucket, which must be thoroughly cleaned between feeds.
- 2.7 Calves fed together in a group should be of similar size and care must be taken to ensure that they are all able to drink at the same time.
- 2.8 A high standard of hygiene must be adopted and adhered to in the rearing of calves.
- 2.9 Calves must not be weaned before 6 weeks of age, and it is essential that calves are eating significant quantities of solid food before they are weaned.
- 2.10 Where milk substitutes are fed they must be mixed according to manufacturers' instructions.
- 2.11 Unweaned calves must have unlimited access to complete calf pellets, grass or palatable dried feed and fibrous roughage. Fresh clean water must be available from day eight.
- 2.12 Calves older than 14 days must have access each day to dried feed or forage material containing sufficient digestible fibre.

2.13 The calves' diet must prevent anaemia and any mineral and vitamin deficiency.

### **3. FACILITIES**

3.1 All facilities, including pens, races, ramps must be designed, constructed, maintained and regularly inspected to ensure they are free of dangerous or hazardous features. The use of damaged facilities shall be suspended until repaired.

3.2 There must be no physical features of the environment which cause recurring injuries to the animals.

3.3 Pens shall be designed and positioned so as to ensure rapid runoff of water out of the pens and minimise water-logging.

3.4 Floors should be made of non-slip material or be maintained so as to reduce the risk of slipping. Floors must not be so rough as to cause foot damage nor so smooth as to result in slipping.

3.5 Races must be of such design and width, and so constructed, to allow the free and unhindered passage of animals. Races must be free of obstacles and drains must be covered.

3.6 Handling facilities shall be designed, constructed and maintained to prevent livestock injuries, bruising or abrasions, and to promote ease of stock movement and handling procedures.

3.7 Animals must be protected from inclement weather.

3.8 Ramps shall be suitably designed and maintained to ensure safe and easy movement of animals and shall not have a gradient exceeding 30degrees.

### **4. CALF PENS**

4.1 Calf pens must be of a size which is appropriate for the age, size and breed of the animal. The calf must be able to stand up, turn round, lie down, rest and groom itself without hindrance.

4.2 Calf pens must be cleaned on a daily basis and thoroughly cleaned, disinfected and dried prior to housing a newborn calf.

- 4.3 Bedding is required to provide for comfort and thermal insulation.
- 4.4 The flooring, particularly slatted floors, shall be designed, constructed and maintained to avoid injury to the calves.
- 4.5 Calves are very prone to hypothermia and always need to be provided with shelter, which must be draught free.
- 4.6 Calves must not be muzzled.
- 4.7 Calf pens/areas must be arranged so that they can see and hear each other, and provide limited physical contact, while preventing suckling on each other.
- 4.8 Lighting inside buildings should be such that animals can be thoroughly inspected, but not so intense as to cause discomfort. Lighting must not remain on for periods exceeding 14 hours.
- 4.9 Calves may not be kept permanently in darkness. Buildings must be illuminated to replicate normal daylight hours.
- 4.10 Where calves are housed inside a building care must be taken to ensure that ventilation is sufficient to remove toxic gases and dust, and to maintain airflow without causing draughts.

## **5. STOCKING DENSITY AND GROUPING**

- 5.1 Stocking density of pens may not be less than 10m<sup>2</sup> per adult animal. Max 20 cattle per acre. 10-12 preferable.
- 5.2 Cattle shall be placed in pens appropriate to their size, age and gender.
- 5.3 Blind, deformed or injured livestock shall be penned separately and must receive appropriate attention.
- 5.4 Livestock harassed by pen mates i.e. runts, females on heat, etc. shall be removed and grouped appropriately.
- 5.5 Fractious or aggressive animals shall be culled or penned separately.
- 5.6 Cattle which are calving must be kept separate from other animals, except other calving cows.

## **6. HEALTH**

- 6.1 Injured, sick or excessively tired cattle shall not be transported unless to an abattoir or vet.
- 6.2 All procedures, i.e. Identification and vaccination, shall be undertaken only by suitably trained and competent personnel. These procedures should be under veterinary supervision or advice where appropriate.
- 6.3 Sick or injured cattle shall be promptly treated or humanely slaughtered (where necessary).
- 6.4 Treatment/isolation facilities must provide for suitable food, water, bedding and shelter for the cattle kept there.
- 6.5 All cattle shall receive regular and frequent preventative treatment against external and internal parasites , or as necessary according to veterinary advice.
- 6.6 An appropriate preventative control programme must be used for the control of flies.
- 6.7 The necessary vaccinations must be undertaken according to legislation and veterinary advice.
- 6.8 All equipment used for treating, dosing or vaccination of cattle shall be cleaned and instruments sterilized. Ideally disposable needles should be used.

## **7. HANDLING**

- 7.1 Livestock shall not be confined in any handling facility other than a normal pen for longer than is necessary to perform the procedure.
- 7.2 Shouting, kicking, whipping, tail twisting shall not be permitted.
- 7.3 Livestock shall not be left in restraining facilities unattended.
- 7.4 Animals must be handled calmly and quietly.



7.5 Electric prodders should only be used when absolutely necessary, and then must not be applied to sensitive areas such as genital areas and face.

## **8. MILKING**

8.1 Cows in full milk are especially prone to udder injury, and must be handled with extra caution.

8.2 No more than 18 hours should elapse between milkings during early lactation (the first 10 weeks) unless the cow is suckling a calf.

8.3 Lactating cows must be milked out prior to being removed for sale or transport.

8.4 All cases of mastitis must be treated promptly and underlying predisposing factors corrected.

8.5 Cows with chronic mastitis should be humanely slaughtered/culled.

8.6 The highest standard of hygiene must be practised in the milking area.

8.7 Udder, teats and flanks must be clean, dry and free from sores on entry to the milking area.

8.8 Milking machinery must be regularly checked and properly maintained.

8.9 Milking machine cups and liners as well as any other relevant equipment must be in good working order to prevent teat damage.

## **9 SURGICAL PROCEDURES**

9.1 Nose-rings used in bulls should be smooth and well-fitting, and should be utilised correctly as not to inflict pain.

9.2 Heifers should not be left trying to calve for longer than 4 hours and adult cows no longer than 2 hours before assistance is given or professional help sought.

- 9.3 Calving should only be induced under instruction or direction of a veterinarian, and with full post induction treatment and care being administered.
- 9.4 Cows of which calving have been induced must be inspected at least twice a day, and receive appropriate attention, especially those with distended udders.
- 9.5 No docking of tails will be permitted as a standard procedure.
- 9.6 Surgical procedures may only be undertaken by, or under the direct instruction of a qualified veterinarian.
- 9.7 Stockmen must be able to demonstrate their proficiency in procedures which have the potential to cause suffering e.g. injections, foot trimming, disbudding, castration and marking, and ensure the correct methods are used for these procedures.

## **10. EMERGENCY SLAUGHTER**

- 10.1 Premature or very weak calves (under 15kg bodyweight at birth) should be humanely destroyed as soon as possible after birth, unless they are provided with intensive care and nursing.
- 10.2 Calves with severe physical defects and painful congenital deformities should be humanely destroyed as soon as possible after birth.
- 10.3 Seriously injured or terminally sick cattle shall be slaughtered quickly and humanely. In the case of downers, that are not able to walk or be humanely carried, they must be slaughtered immediately, where they lie.
- 10.4 Slaughter must be carried out humanely, by suitably trained, skilled and competent staff using suitable equipment.

## **11. EMERGENCY PROVISIONS**

- 11.1 Suitable plans must be in place to deal with emergency situations such as fire, flood, strikes or accidents/breakdowns.
- 11.2 All staff must be aware of and understand emergency plans, and they must be prepared to undertake their tasks effectively and efficiently.

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*REFERENCE*

*Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Bobby Calves – Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Wellington, New Zealand (1993)*

*Code of Recommendations and Minimum Standards for the Welfare of Dairy Cattle – Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Wellington, New Zealand 1992*