

# Live Animal Assessment and Market Specifications

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## The things you can do on farm:

- Assess your beef business & match productive capacity to specific target markets
- Research market specifications
- Undertake some live animal assessment.
- Understand the selling systems
- Utilise feedback sheets to measure performance

## Market Specifications

### Store Markets

**A. General Store Cattle:** Cows and Calves, Preg tested in Calf (PTIC) Cows and heifers, store weaners, store yearlings. Normally sold either liveweight or \$/Hd at a physical auction, privately or using A+.

**B. Direct Store Market: (Grids normally available)**

<b>Domestic Feeder Steers or Heifers:</b>	280 – 400 kg (L) curfewed, 0-2 Teeth, Breed Specific
<b>Export Feeders Steers:</b>	380 – 520 kg (L) curfewed, 0-4 Teeth, Breed Specific
<b>EU Export Feeders Steers and Heifers :</b>	380 – 550 kg (L) curfewed 0-2 Teeth, Breed Specific

### Slaughter

**Local Trade (Light)**

130 – 170 kg HSCW 5-15 mm P8

**Local Trade**

170 – 220 kg HSCW 5 – 15 mm P8

Can be MSA graded – Must be good bodies.

**Supermarket**

180 – 280 kg HSCW 4 – 14 mm P8 0-2 Tooth

Predominantly Grain Fed, with full Chiller Assessment. Grassfed has same specifications.

**MSA Slaughter**

200 – 340 kg HSCW 7 – 22 mm P8 Fat 0-2 Tooth \*

**(Steers and Heifers)**

\* Now includes 4 Tooths

**Domestic Grain Fed (MSA)**

180 – 319 kg Drsd 5 – 12 mm P8 Fat 0-4 Tooth

Heifers 60 Days on Feed (DOF) & Steers 70 DOF in NFAS Feedlot. Mostly now MSA graded.

**Short Grain Fed**

300 – 420 kg HSCW 7-22mm P8 Fat 0-4 Tooth

**(100/120/150 Day Str/Hfr)**

Heifers & Steers 100 DOF in NFAS Feedlot

**Japan (JapOx)**

280 kg – 420 kg HSCW 7 – 22 mm Fat 0 – 4 Tooth

Grass or Grain Fed

**EU (Steers & Heifers)**

240 – 439 kg HSCW 7 – 22 mm Fat 0 – 4 Tooth

A – C Butt Shape Grass or Grain Fed – Chiller Assessed

## Live Animal Assessment

“Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.”

*Cowboy Quote*

Live animal assessment allows cattle to be drafted into lines that are going to meet the requirements of the buyer. Different markets (store or slaughter) can have a different emphasis on live animal attributes but the following four measures will cover most situations.

- 1 Live Weight
- 2 Dressing %
- 3 Dentition
- 4 Fat Coverage

### Live weight

Live weight is still the most basic and important measure for an animal. It is very hard to always accurately estimate the weights of animals based on visual assessment. We recommend the use of scales.

Some Key Points:

- Have good, well set up & maintained scales – check to ensure weighing accurately
- Understand & set consistent curfews – to allow Average Daily Gains
- Understand cattle gut fill & Shrink Losses – you very rarely sell on a full weight.

Situation	% Loss from Full Wt
0 – 2 Hours Off Feed	0
12 – 16 hour wet curfew (Overnight)	5
8-hour transport curfew (Dry)	6
16-hour dry curfew	7
24-hour dry curfew	8 - 10

### Dressing %

Producers who sell directly to processors on slaughter grids get paid on a carcass weight basis. The expected carcass weight (kg HSCW) can be related back to an on farm liveweight using a dressing %.

- Dressing % = carcass weight (kg)/live weight (kg)\* 100
- Curfews change the live weight and therefore make large changes to the dressing %. This is the major cause of error in judging expected carcass weights. Pregnancy status also can have a major impact of the dressing %.
- More minor influences include HGP treatment and diet

## **Dentition**

Dentition is increasingly becoming an important market specification. Many feedlots now have price differentials for 0, 2 or 4 tooth cattle.

There is no easy way to assess dentition other than to individually mouth cattle. The age the cattle break teeth is a very individual trait. No two animals are the same! Breed, nutritional history and diet all can affect the rate that animals “break” teeth. Please note that as soon as there is any rupturing along the gum line it is deemed to have broken teeth.

### **Very Approximate Ages for Milk/Permanent Teeth**

Milk Tooth: 0 to 24 Months	4 Tooth: 24 to 36 Months	8 Tooth: 36 Months +
2 Tooth: 18 to 30 Months	6 Tooth: 30 to 42 Months	

## **Fat Cover**

Assessing fat coverage is critical for selecting the right animals to go for slaughter or for performance testing in breeding herds.

Fat measurement has been standardised to a measure at the P8 site (on the rump) and uses either mm of fat or fat scores.

<b>Fat at P8 Site</b>	<b>Fat Score</b>
0-2 mm	Score 1
3-6 mm	Score 2
7-12 mm	Score 3
13 –22 mm	Score 4
23 – 32 mm	Score 5
33 mm +	Score 6

## **Feedback Sheets**

There is no use in drafting all the cattle up, sending them off and then wondering how they went. All processors and many feedlots now provide feedback sheets (often in excel). Get the sheets and work out the shrink or the dressing %. See how this compares to what you estimated. The more you do it, the more you will identify things that you can do better and ultimately increase compliance rates.

## **Reference Material**

I would like to acknowledge Swift Australia and Smithfield Feedlot for the kind use of their grids.

Primefact 622: Live Beef Animal Assessment, NSW DPI May 2007

Primefact 340: Dressing Percentages for Cattle, NSW DPI Jan 2007

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