



## **NLRS cattle assessing**

The National Livestock Reporting Service (NLRS) has a proud history of providing accurate and timely market information. The NLRS comprises a head office team, based in North Sydney, and 21 livestock market officers (LMO) scattered throughout regional Australia.

LMOs attend 44 cattle markets throughout Australia each week – collecting, collating and analysing market data. All LMOs are regularly assessed to ensure they maintain their national accreditation as livestock assessors. To be certain that a statistically valid data sample is being collected at each sale, LMOs must record a minimum of 70% of the total stock offered for sale. In reality, the introduction of new technologies has allowed coverage to average closer to 90%.

### Assessing beef cattle

To describe cattle, the NLRS uses a standardised language across all states that relies on a combination of sex, age, weight, fat and degree of muscularity. All classifications allow for a more accurate account of the market, highlighting aspects which will contribute to the ultimate price of the animal.

### Age, sex and weight

Table 1 details the age, sex and weight categories, and relevant descriptions used by the NLRS.

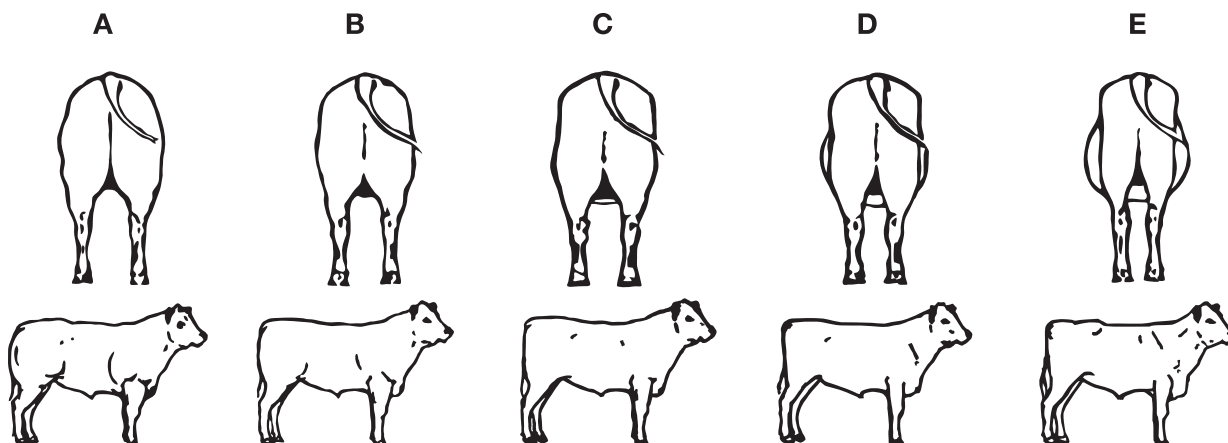
The following classifications effect price determination, also used by the NLRS to highlight with each category generally providing a price differential compared to the stock to be slaughtered for the larger domestic and export markets.

- GF** Certified grain fed cattle
- RS** Cattle purchased by restocker, either to be re-fattened or kept for future breeding
- FD** Cattle purchased by lot feeders
- DA** Dairy bred cows, bulls and manufacturing steers
- PTIC** Cows or grown heifers pregnancy tested in calf

Table 1 Age, sex and weight classifications

Age/sex category	Description
Calves	Male and female calves less than six months old.
Vealer steers and heifers	Castrate male or female cattle with no permanent teeth. Less than 12 months old and still suckling.
Yearling steers and heifers	Castrate male or female cattle. Predominately with no permanent teeth, however two are permissible.
Steers	Export type castrate male cattle with up to eight permanent teeth.
Heifers	Export type female cattle with up to eight permanent teeth.
Manufacturing steers	Castrate male cattle of any age including dairy crossbred and aged types.
Cows	Female cattle with up to eight permanent teeth.
Bulls	Male and castrate male cattle of any age showing bullish traits.

Figure 1 Cattle muscle scores



### Muscle

The muscle of a beef animal is the most valuable part of the carcass. To help identify the red meat content of different cattle, a method of evaluating shape, termed 'muscle score', is used.

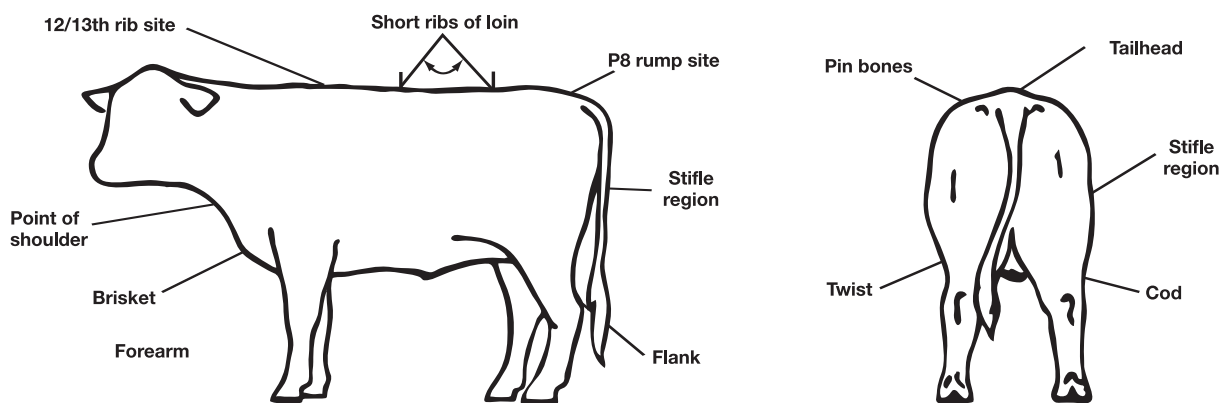
Muscle score measures the degree of muscularity of an animal and describes the shape of cattle independent of the influence of fatness. Muscling is the degree of thickness or convexity of an animal relative to its frame size, after adjustments have

been made for subcutaneous fat. The degree of muscling positively influences dressing percentage and meat yield, therefore indicating the greater value of more heavily muscled animals.

There are five muscle scores ranging from A (extremely well muscled) through to E (lightly muscled). These scores are outlined in Figure 1. These scores may further be extended to 15 by adding plus and minus to each score (eg A+ to E-).



Figure 2 Reference points used in fat assessment



As cattle fatten, ribs and hindquarter muscle seams become less visible and the brisket, flank, cod and twist all fill out. In addition, fat mounds beside the tailhead increase in size, and the tailhead becomes less prominent. A deep full brisket is indicative of excess fat.

## Fat

There is increasing pressure for cattle sellers to meet market specifications for fatness, and a failure to meet specific fat requirements will often result in significant price discounts offered by cattle buyers.

There are six fat scores ranging from 1 (lean) to 6 (fat). The amount of fat coverage for each score is shown in Table 2, and reference points used for fat assessment in Figure 2.

Table 2 Cattle fat scores

Score	P8 site (mm)	12th rib (mm)
1	0–2	0–1
2	3–6	2–3
3	7–12	4–7
4	13–22	8–12
5	23–32	13–18
6	32+	18+

## Dressing percentage

Dressed or carcass weight refers to the weight of a carcass once the live animal has been slaughtered with hide, feet, tail, head and innards removed. In the AUS-MEAT language, this is also referred to as hot standard carcass weight (HSCW).

Dressing percentage is simply carcass weight expressed as a percentage of liveweight. That is:

$$\text{Dressing percentage} = \frac{\text{carcass weight}}{\text{liveweight}} \times 100$$

Dressing percentage can also be determined by expressing carcass weight price as a percentage of liveweight price. That is:

$$\text{Dressing percentage} = \frac{\text{liveweight price}}{\text{carcass weight price}} \times 100$$

The term 'yield' is often used instead of dressing percentage. It is important not to confuse the term 'yield' in this context with 'saleable meat yield', which is the difference between dressed weight and saleable meat content.



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