

On-farm management and marketing

	Recommended practice	Why?	How?	✓ or x
1	Select cattle on temperament as well as performance characteristics.	Animals with poor temperament are stress-susceptible and can disturb others within a mob.	There are several tests that can be applied to determine temperament. Advice should be sought from your local Department of Agriculture advisor.	
2	Familiarise animals to handling and human contact.	Animals exposed to frequent positive handling and training move more easily and are likely to be more resilient to pre-slaughter stresses.	Familiarising means frequent and gentle handling and movement of your stock, and getting your animals used to yards and transport. Yard weaning is one way to achieve familiarity. Try exposing animals to different stimuli (in a positive way) such as motorbikes, people on foot and people on horses.	
3	Ensure cattle are on a rising plane of nutrition prior to marketing.	Good nutrition keeps the glycogen 'bucket' topped up. A low plane of nutrition will begin to deplete the glycogen even before you muster them.	Enable growth rates of at least 0.9kg/day. In some cases, supplementary feeding will be necessary during periods when pasture quality declines (eg during winter or drought). Note: Adequate fat cover does not necessarily indicate high muscle glycogen content.	
4	Provide susceptible slaughter cattle (those with a high value and potential for discounting for dark cutting) with a high energy diet prior to marketing.	Stock, such as bulls and heifers, on poor pasture are more likely to have low muscle glycogen levels, and hence may produce higher pH meat.	Cattle with suspected low glycogen levels can be given four weeks of carefully administered, full grain feeding prior to slaughter.	
5	Where possible exclude heifers in oestrus from slaughter consignments.	Heifers in oestrus will encourage increased mounting activity.	Separate heifers showing signs of oestrus from consignments.	
6	Market bulls separately.	Bulls are at higher risk of dark cutting due to their mounting and fighting activities.	Don't market bulls with other animals.	

	Recommended practice	Why?	How?	✓ or ✗
7	Don't market for slaughter too soon after purchase. Minimise drafting-off cattle just prior to transport.	Cattle need time to adjust to their new surroundings and herd mates. Extra movement and disturbance of animals causes glycogen depletion especially when rushed.	Don't market newly purchased cattle within four weeks of purchase. Draft cattle into slaughter lines at least two weeks prior to slaughter where cattle have to be mixed. Cattle selected for slaughter from within a management group should be drafted as close to transport time as practical.	
8	Comply with manufacturer's instructions regarding the use of HGPs.	Research has found that cattle consigned while under the influence of HGPs are at greater risk of dark cutting. The risk increases even more in heifers.	Check the long acting properties of the HGP on the label and ensure cattle aren't consigned while the HGP is still active. (Note: chemical withholding periods must be adhered to.)	
9	Avoid marketing in, or through, weather extremes.	Sudden climatic changes can increase the risk of dark cutting. This is particularly evident during periods of cold, wet weather.	Avoid marketing under extreme weather conditions (very hot, very cold, raining, or storms) or when there is the potential for sudden climatic changes (particularly cold weather).	
10	Only market healthy animals for slaughter.	Animals with visible signs of disease, or those recovering from disease or trauma are at high risk of dark cutting (marketing animals with obvious signs of disease/trauma is also in breach of the animal welfare code of practice).	Ensure sick animals are treated, well rested and recovered before marketing.	
11	Use well-designed and constructed facilities for slaughter stock preparation.	Animals do not move well through poorly designed yards. Additional force and contact is often required to shift animals which in turn increases the potential for stress and bruising.	Use yards built to a good standard and designed for stock behavioural traits. Consider implementing on-farm QA programs such as CATTLE CARE™ or equivalent programs, which address bruising and other dark cutting risk factors.	
12	Consider supplementary feeding before consigning.	When pasture quality declines, supplementary feeding is a useful strategy to minimise the risk of dark cutting. The use of electrolyte or mineral supplements may also prove quite effective (this strategy is still under evaluation and is no substitute for good nutrition).	Provide forage/grain supplements to cattle when on-farm pasture conditions decline.	

Mustering and holding of stock

	Recommended practice	Why?	How?	✓ or ✗
13	Use only reputable transport companies.	Poor transport conditions increases stress levels.	Use transport companies operating under a quality assurance scheme and utilising good animal handling practices (eg Truckcare).	
14	Mustering and assemble stock as quietly and efficiently as possible.	Cattle have sensitive hearing. Unexpected, loud or foreign noises and unnecessary movement can be highly stressful to livestock.	Refrain from using excessive and unnecessary yelling and whip cracking. Use skilled and trained cattle handlers. Work within the flight-zone and point of balance.	
15	Avoid running cattle to assembly areas.	Strenuous physical activity depletes muscle glycogen levels. Trotting cattle for 4km can remove around 30% of the muscle glycogen. It can then be difficult to raise the glycogen levels to an acceptable level before slaughter.	Set aside ample time for mustering.	
16	Minimise use of dogs.	Cattle view dogs as predatory animals. ie Dogs can create stress, especially in confined spaces.	Try using noise or drafting flags to move cattle.	
17	Keep animals in their social groups and don't mix mobs of unfamiliar animals.	Cattle become stressed or agitated when separated from their herd. Lone animals are more difficult to handle. Similarly, mixing unfamiliar animals results in fighting to establish a new social order.	Avoid mixing unfamiliar mobs in holding paddocks prior to transport. If mixing of stock is unavoidable, do so at least one month before marketing and then remuster. Try to avoid isolating any animal. Don't draft out just one or two animals from a herd to meet an order.	

Drafting and loading for transport

	Recommended practice	Why?	How?	✓ or ✗
18	Reduce or eliminate the use of electric prodders and other goads.	As well as risking bruising, excessive use of jiggers and prodders will cause additional stress.	Use techniques such as working the point of balance and flight-zone. Try using flappers, rattles or drafting flags instead.	
19	Be patient, and allow time and space for cattle to move through the yards.	Hurrying animals can increase stress and deplete glycogen levels.	Use trained and skilled stock handlers familiar with quiet and efficient handling. Make sure gates are open before attempting to drive cattle.	
20	Use well designed loading ramps.	Loading ramps, if not designed correctly, can impede animal movement and cause injury.	Loading ramps must be non-slip and less than 25° slope, preferably with stepped incline and double deck loading facilities if two deck transports are loaded regularly.	
21	Avoid dehydrating animals.	Dehydration can lead to stress and glycogen loss.	Make sure water is freely available to stock before they are trucked.	



Level 1, 165 Walker Street
 North Sydney NSW 2060
 Ph: +61 2 9463 9333
 Fax: +61 2 9463 9393
www.mla.com.au