

Animal Care



Fact Sheet: Cattle Assessments

Dairy Farmers of Canada's on-farm quality assurance program - proAction® - fosters excellent farm practices and a culture of continuous improvement. The Animal Care module of proAction includes a key requirement: the cattle assessment. Farmers must have a sample of their milking herds assessed for body condition score; hock, knee and neck injuries; and lameness, and farmers must keep their valid cattle assessment reports on file when they are due for their next proAction validation.

Here are answers to some of the frequently asked questions regarding the cattle assessments.

Who will perform the cattle assessment on my farm?

With the support of provincial associations, Dairy Farmers of Canada (DFC) contracted Holstein Canada to perform the first round of cattle assessments (2016 to 2018).

When do I need to have the first assessment completed?

From September 2017 on, farmers must have an assessment performed prior to their validation. For the first round, the first assessment can be completed up to 24 months prior to a farmer's validation.

Holstein Canada is sending farmers an information package well ahead of their validation dates. This package contains a survey farmers must complete indicating date options for the assessment visit, and requesting farm information (such as barn and milking system type, etc.) to help assessors plan the visit.

Holstein Canada plans assessment visits according to the classification schedules and every farmer's validation date. In order to ensure a smooth scheduling process, farmers are encouraged to respond to Holstein Canada's survey as soon as possible after receiving the package. Holstein Canada may not be able to accommodate cattle assessments for farmers who miss the date options provided. Furthermore, if a farmer does not respond to Holstein Canada, but later requests cattle assessment services, an additional administration fee

may apply to cover the costs associated with re-entering the farmer into the queue.

How often do I need to have an assessment completed?

Cattle assessments must be conducted every two years. Second and subsequent assessments must be done within 12 months prior to a farm's validation.

How are assessors trained?

Ensuring assessments are performed accurately and consistently is critical. Prior to becoming assessors, Holstein Canada employees attend two-and-a-half days of training, which involves both classroom and on-farm sessions. Attendees must then successfully complete an exam before they are authorized to perform cattle assessments on-farm. Assessors are also required to complete additional exams every six months to ensure they maintain scoring accuracy.

What does the cattle assessment report look like?

Once the assessment is complete, the farmer receives a cattle assessment report, which contains a summary of the percentage of cows with acceptable scores for each measure, as well as details of the scores given to each cow in the sample. The report also includes a Peer Report, which indicates how the herd's results compare to the results from a significant number of herds across Canada.

What do my Peer Report results mean?

The Peer Reports show three categories:

Green zone = the scores that meet the Excellent targets or the highest 25 percent of scores achieved by herds, whichever is larger.

For any results that are in the green zone, the herd is meeting the current goal.

Yellow zone = the results that the middle 50 percent of herds have achieved.

For any results that are in the yellow zone, the farmer should consider corrective actions and work on continuous improvement. The current goal is the green zone.

Red zone = the results that the bottom 25 percent of herds have achieved.

For any results that are in the red zone, the farmer must document a corrective action plan prior to the validation. Farmers should work with their herd veterinarian, nutritionist and/or dairy specialist to establish the plan, and start implementing the plan to improve. Farmers will need to show their corrective action plans to the validator.

Note: For several measures, more than 25 percent of the herds in the population sample met the Excellent targets. All Excellent results are assigned to the green zone. The remaining herds were then divided into two zones: yellow and red zones, with the top two thirds of these remaining herds in the yellow zone and the bottom third in the red zone.

What is the purpose of the cattle assessments?

The objective of the first assessment is to obtain data and establish Canadian benchmarks for body condition score; hock, knee and neck injuries; and lameness. Individual herd assessments will also provide a benchmark for each herd, giving farmers an opportunity to monitor continuous improvement over time.

In order to meet this proAction requirement, farmers must provide at the time of validation:

- the cattle assessment report conducted by a qualified assessor; and,
- a documented corrective action plan to improve measures that fall within the red zone, if any.

If this documentation is not available at time of validation, the validator will issue a major non-compliance, which will prevent a farmer from achieving or maintaining proAction registration. This may carry penalties according to provincial policies.

What do I have to do by the next assessment or validation? When do I have to show improvement?

If a herd scores in the red zone or yellow zone for any measures, the farmer must strive to improve those scores by the next cattle assessment. DFC plans to move towards set targets and set improvement criteria to be applied to the second and subsequent rounds of assessments. Provincial associations will notify farmers when these changes are implemented.

How can I improve my scores? Who can help me?

Farmers should work with their herd veterinarians, hoof trimmers, nutritionists or dairy specialists, and implement their specialized corrective action plans to improve their scores. DFC has published fact sheets, based on research related to body condition score, injuries and lameness, which outline common causes of each issue and suggestions on how to improve, and ultimately to achieve better scores by subsequent cattle assessments. Farmers should also consider regularly scoring cattle for the animal-based measures outlined in the proAction Reference Manual. For these tools, visit DFC's [website:](http://www.dairyfarmers.ca/proAction/resources/animal-care) www.dairyfarmers.ca/proAction/resources/animal-care.

I did not have a cattle assessment done before my validation. How do I get one done now?

Farmers should contact the provincial association as soon as possible to discuss options to have a cattle assessment done.