

Animal Care



Quick Guide to Mobility Scoring - Gait Scoring

- ❖ Preferred method for detecting lameness in dairy cattle
- ❖ Use with free-stall or other loose-housing systems
- ❖ Use with tie-stall systems where cattle are routinely exercised, if practical

1. Establish a suitable location: Often the easiest location is the transfer alley between the parlour and the pen (particularly after a footbath as this will slow the animals down).

Criteria for choosing a location:

- Distance allows observation of cattle walking for **four strides**
- Surface is smooth/flat
- Avoid slatted concrete surfaces if possible
- Avoid sloped flooring (downward or upward) or alleys with steps

2. Gait score sample cattle:

- Record the identification number of the animal.
- If cattle have been released from tie-stalls, habituate them to walking by walking up and down a passageway in a calm manner until the cattle walk in a straight line at a steady pace.
- Observe at least four strides for each animal and record the degree of limping on the Cattle Assessment Record. The gait scoring categories are based on the Gait Scoring System referenced in Appendix F of the Code of Practice, developed by Flower and Weary (2006) (see Table 1).
 - Score 'A' for acceptable for no limp present (equivalent to Scores of 1 and 2)
 - Score 'M' for monitor for mild or moderate limp present (equivalent to Score 3)
 - Score 'R' for requires corrective action for an obvious or severe limp present (equivalent to Scores of 4 and 5)
- The **gait behaviours associated with limping are:**
 - Favouring one or more limbs
 - Uneven weight bearing with weight transfer at walk: an animal free from injury should bear weight evenly over the four limbs
 - Reluctance to bear weight on a limb: an animal with an injury may not place all her weight on an affected limb and may walk with an uneven, irregular, jerky or awkward step, as if favouring one leg

Table 1: Gait Scoring System for Dairy Cows (from Appendix F of the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle, 2009)

Score	Description	Behavioural Criteria
1 Sound	Smooth and fluid movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flat back when standing and walking • All legs bear weight equally • Joints flex freely • Head carriage remains steady as the animal moves
2	Ability to move freely not diminished	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flat or mildly arched back when standing and walking • All legs bear weight equally • Joints slightly stiff • Head carriage remains steady
3	Capable of locomotion but ability to move freely is compromised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flat or mildly arched back when standing, but obviously arched when walking • Slight limp can be discerned in one limb • Joints show signs of stiffness but do not impede freedom of movement • Head carriage remains steady
4	Ability to move freely is obviously diminished	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obvious arched back when standing and walking • Reluctant to bear weight on at least one limb but still uses that limb in locomotion • Strides are hesitant and deliberate and joints are stiff • Head bobs slightly as animal moves in accordance with the sore hoof making contact with the ground
5 Severely Lame	Ability to move is severely restricted Must be vigorously encouraged to stand and/or move	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme arched back when standing and walking • Inability to bear weight on one or more limbs • Obvious joint stiffness characterized by lack of joint flexion with very hesitant and deliberate strides • One or more strides obviously shortened • Head obviously bobs as sore hoof makes contact with the ground
source: University of British Columbia Animal Welfare Program		

Taken from Alberta's Humane Handling of Dairy Cattle - Standards for the Transportation of Cull Animals, original source: University of British Columbia Animal Welfare Program.