







Raising the welfare standards for beef cattle

	Requirement	Why is it important	SPCA Certified Standard	Code of Welfare Minimum Standards
 <p>CATTLE HEALTH</p>	Food and water	High quality and sufficient food and water help beef cattle maintain good health. It is important that the food, and the way it is fed, minimise the risk of nutritional disorders such as bloat, acidosis, or mineral and vitamin deficiencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pasture must meet the nutritional requirements of all stages of life and production, or additional feed must be provided. Trace element supplementation is in place and monitored. Free access to clean, fresh water at all times. Water quality is tested at least every three years and for any new water sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient quantities of food provided to maintain good health, meet physiological needs, and minimise nutritional disorders. Trace element supplementation not required. Access to water must meet daily needs and water must not be harmful to health. No water quality testing required.
	Body condition score (BCS)	Keeping the body condition of cattle within a certain range ensures they are healthy and able to cope with weather extremes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BCS to be kept between 6 and 8 (on a scale from 1-10). Action required if it falls below 4. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action must be taken if BCS falls to 1 (on a scale of 0-5).
	Calf feeding	Calves need adequate amounts of colostrum to ensure they have the best start in life as it supports their immune system and helps protect them from becoming sick. Calves should receive sufficient liquid feed more than once a day to allow them to grow, be healthy, and to meet their behavioural need to suckle. Calves that receive insufficient milk will be hungry and will not grow well. Inability to express their sucking motivation will be frustrating to calves and can lead to abnormal oral behaviours such as sucking on other calves (cross-sucking).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hand-reared calves are given 10 -12% of their bodyweight of warm colostrum for the first week after birth, fed twice a day. After the first week, calves are fed milk twice a day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient colostrum to ensure welfare. Suitable liquid feed until rumen can utilise pasture/other solids.
	Pain relief	Some husbandry procedures, for example disbudding and castration, can cause significant anxiety, fear, discomfort, and pain in cattle. Minimising pain and associated stress will result in better welfare outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre- and post-operative pain relief is required when doing any surgical procedures, regardless of the animal's age. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pain relief required for some, but not all procedures. Not required for all ages.
	Health plan	A farm-specific animal health plan allows farmers to identify specific challenges on their farm and put in place measures to ensure the health and welfare of their animals is safeguarded.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An animal health plan must be developed and maintained with a veterinarian. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Animal health plan not required.
 <p>ENVIRONMENT</p>	Pasture access	Pasture access allows beef cattle to engage in normal behaviours such as grazing, gives them some choice over what food they eat and where to rest, and provides opportunity to access shade and shelter, thereby promoting positive mental experiences and welfare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keeping beef cattle off pasture is not allowed unless in exceptional circumstances for short periods of time (for example during weather extremes). The use of confined outdoor areas for fattening beef cattle (feedlots) is not allowed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No limit on time off-paddock. No requirement for grazing/pasture access. No restrictions on keeping cattle in feedlots.
	Shade and shelter	Provision of shade and shelter lets animals manage their own temperature requirements to avoid discomfort and heat and cold stress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to shade and shelter at all times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to shelter is required to reduce the risk to health and welfare caused by exposure to cold and to minimise the effects of heat stress.
	Emergency preparedness	In the event of an emergency, it is important that animals are looked after appropriately to ensure health and welfare is safeguarded. Whether that is ensuring access to feed and water during a drought, dry lying surfaces during wet weather, or access to high pastures during floods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An emergency plan is in place and is reviewed annually. All staff are familiar with the plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency plan not required.
 <p>BEHAVIOUR</p>	Enrichment	Enrichment makes an animal's environment more interesting, encouraging them to explore and allowing them to engage in normal behaviours to meet their mental and physical needs. Enrichment for cattle include objects on which cattle can groom or scratch, which helps to relieve itches and which they love doing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to objects on which to scratch or groom provided within all pastures, such as trees or fixed structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enrichment not required.
	Weaning calves	Keeping calves with their mothers until natural weaning helps support the social bond between the two, creating positive mental experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weaning of calves does not occur before 6 months of age. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No minimum age for weaning.
	Handling	Regular handling of animals in a manner that is calm, gentle and that takes the animals' behaviour into consideration will reduce fear, anxiety, and stress. Positive human-animal interactions also make it easier to handle and move animals. Appropriate animal-human interactions may even be enriching for animals and can create positive mental experiences (for both animals and humans!).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-stress handling and husbandry techniques to be used. Electric prodder use is prohibited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handled in a manner to minimise risk of pain, injury, or distress. Use minimum force when moving cattle. Electric prodder use allowed on cattle weighing over 150kg.
 <p>CONSUMER ASSURANCES</p>	Animal welfare audits	Announced and particularly unannounced audits ensure transparency, integrity, and credibility of standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independently audited by an external company, annually, and at least one additional unannounced audit/year. Additionally, SPCA Certified visit every single farm when they join the programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Animal welfare audits not required.
	Free from sub-therapeutic antibiotics	Using antibiotics sub-therapeutically - where there is no diagnosed disease, condition, or microorganism (bacteria etc) - can lead to antibiotic resistance and means that healthy animals are unnecessarily treated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of prescribed therapeutic antibiotics for the treatment of a specific, diagnosed condition, disease, or injury only. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medication can only be used in accordance with registration conditions and manufacturer's instructions or professional advice.