



BUL 919

BQA Guidelines for Culling Beef Animals

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Key Points

- Cull cow and bull beef products supply 15%–20% of total US beef production.
- Cull cattle should be euthanized when they cannot walk, are emaciated, or pose a threat to public health.
- Keep in mind the need to ensure consumer confidence in the beef industry. If an animal does not meet industry standards for sale in a public auction, it should not be taken to sale.



Identifying cull cows and bulls

HAVING A PLAN for identifying cull animals is key for the maintenance of a safe and healthy cow herd.

- Cattle with dangerously aggressive dispositions should be culled and marketed immediately, to reduce the risk of injury to those handling the animals.
- Cattle showing signs of lameness should be separated from the herd and the cause of lameness should be determined.
- In cases of non-infectious lameness (e.g., joint dislocation, or injury to tendons or muscles), the animals can be treated and sold. If the lameness is caused by an infection, the animal should be examined by a veterinarian. If the animal is fit for human consumption, it must be harvested immediately by a mobile butcher to reduce suffering and deterioration of meat quality. If not fit for human consumption, the animal should be euthanized immediately.
- Thirty days following the breeding season, pregnancy determination can be used to identify cows that have not bred back. These cows should be culled from the herd to increase the efficiency of the cow herd.
- Cows that have bad conformation, unsound udders, poor mothering ability, or other undesirable physical problems should be culled after raising their calf.
- Once cull animals are identified, body condition score (BCS) and weight should be recorded. Cows of adequate condition (BCS of 5 or higher) can be marketed immediately. Thin cows should be fed to reach a BCS of 5, if cheap feed resources are available.

Euthanasia

The decision to euthanize a cull animal should be made with both animal well-being and consumer confidence in mind.

- Cull animals that are non-ambulatory should be euthanized.

- Cattle with cancer eye, lumpy jaw, and other severe defects should be treated and receive adequate nutrition before being marketed. If the symptoms are too advanced for successful treatment, euthanasia should be performed.
- Severely emaciated cattle should be provided adequate nutrition to reach a target BCS of 5 prior to being marketed. If cattle are emaciated due to disease or injury, euthanasia should be performed.

Feed or sell

The decision to feed or sell cull cattle is up to the discretion of the producer, but the following things should be kept in mind:

- To receive the best market price cull cattle should be fed to a BCS of 5 or greater.
- Prices for culled beef increase during the months from April to August. Depending on access to inexpensive feed resources, feeding cull cattle may be more profitable than immediately marketing them. Be aware of the need for facilities and transportation once cattle can be marketed.

Marketing

Before cattle are marketed, withdrawal times must be strictly followed for any medication or feed additives.

- If cattle are being shipped directly to the packer, ensure that all cattle are healthy enough for transport. Cattle that go down on the truck will not be processed and decrease consumer confidence in the beef industry. When it is suspected that an animal is not strong enough to travel, processing by a mobile butcher is recommended.
- Keep in mind the need to increase consumer confidence in the beef industry. If an animal does

not meet industry standards for sale in a public auction, it should not be taken to sale. Visible defects such as severe lameness and extreme cases of cancer eye should not be sold through public auction, but instead should be euthanized or harvested in a private setting.

Cull cow products

- Culled cattle supply 15%–20% of total US beef production.
- Official USDA grades for non-fed beef are determined by visual scoring of the degree of fat cover and muscling. In descending order of desirability, they are: 1) Commercial, 2) Utility, 3) Cutter, and 4) Canner.
- Not all cull cattle are utilized exclusively for ground beef product. Many meat buyers purchasing from cull cattle markets will utilize tenderloins, ribeyes, and strip loins. Also, much of the value of a cull cow or bull is derived from its hide and byproducts.
- Quality defects typically seen from cull cattle are inadequate muscling, excessive fat trim, lightweight or overweight carcasses, lameness, cancer eye, and non-ambulatory animals. Each of these defects will result in discount at auctions and packing plants.

Summary

Knowing the cow herd and understanding when to cull cattle is key in maintaining a profitable and healthy herd. Culling animals based on disposition, health, and conformation can increase a cow herd's efficiency. An effective culling program can also increase consumer confidence by ensuring that beef products come from quality cattle raised in a safe and healthy environment.

The Idaho Beef Quality Assurance Program is a partnership between University of Idaho Extension and Idaho Beef Council.

The BQA Mission

To maximize consumer confidence and acceptance of beef by focusing the producer's attention to daily production practices that influence the safety, wholesomeness and quality of beef and beef products.

BQA Certification

Certification requirements can be achieved by participating in a training session and completing the BQA quiz and personal contract. Certification is valid for three years. Learn more about BQA certification in Idaho, here: <http://extension.uidaho.edu/bqa/certification/>.