

## **SUPERLOOKERER NOTES (draft)**

In addition to the basic looking duties (correct number of livestock present and in the right field / any obvious signs of ill-health or lameness / water supply & fencing in order), it is helpful to have “Super Lookerers” who can assess the cattle and grazing site in more detail and alert me to any early warning signs.

### **THE CATTLE**

#### **Inspecting cattle for signs of ill-health:**

- listlessness
- separation from the group
- unusual behaviour
- loss of body condition
- loss of appetite
- constipation
- scouring (diarrhoea)
- not cudding
- any unusual discharge from the nostrils or eyes
- producing more saliva than usual
- persistent coughing
- rapid or irregular breathing
- abnormal resting behaviour
- swollen joints
- lameness
- mastitis (abnormalities in udder, eg.swelling)

#### **Condition scoring**

Condition scoring is a technique used for judging the body condition of livestock. See separate handout on this.

#### **Water Supply**

Clean water is imperative to the health of the herd. Watch the animals drink; they should put their noses right in the water and drink without hesitation. If they sniff or lick at the water more than once, there is a water quality problem.

#### **Demeanor**

Most disease processes will result in abnormalities in behaviour; if an animal is not eating its normal amount, is hanging back from its herdmates, is overly or less responsive than normal, it may represent disease somewhere.

#### **Lameness**

Cows should walk with a flat back bearing weight evenly on all four limbs and their hind limbs should track up fully (be placed just behind where the forelimbs left the ground) at walk. If a cow has a shortened stride on any limb, reduced weight bearing on one limb or is unable to keep up with the rest of the animals it should be examined.

## Ruminating (chewing the cud)

Rumination is the regurgitation of fibrous matter from the rumen to the mouth, and the return back to rumen. Rumination is sensitive to the cow's state of being and is impacted by external factors as well as internal rumen functioning. A cow chewing the cud is an indicator of a healthy and comfortable animal. A normal cow will spend 12-14 hours a day lying down; she will eat for 3-4 hours. The optimal rumination time is about 8 or 9 hours; most of this will be when they are lying. Low light, quiet environments and a comfortable resting place are precursors to good rumination. Reduced rumination times are indicators of illness, poor forage availability or heat stress (cows will stand up to cool down, so rumination time decreases).

## Rumen Fill

The rumen in the cow is located predominantly on the left hand side of the abdomen and the area of it that can be detected is the top of the flank between the last rib and the pelvis. If a cow is off her feed or has insufficient food supply the rumen will appear as a sharp sunken triangle as it is empty; the more the rumen fills, the more this space fills. If the space protrudes outwards, this may be a sign of bloat and may require veterinary advice.



## Faecal Consistency

This will vary with the cow's diet but extremely firm faeces can be associated with metabolic problems and very liquid faeces can be associated with intestinal disease, particularly if it smells foul or contains blood. Black faeces can be a sign of bleeding in the stomach and represents digested blood. Fresh blood in faeces represents bleeding from the large intestine or may be trauma (after rectal palpation of artificial insemination). In the manure scoring system below, a score of 3-4 is ideal. A score of 1 represents watery diarrhea and is common in a cow with an infectious disease. A score of 2 is often associated with lush spring pasture or a ration imbalance. A score of 3 is the ideal score for lactating cows with a proper ration. A score of 4 is common in dry cows, heifers and steers. A score of 5 is usually representative of a ration imbalance and the animal will have difficulty defecating; the food source should be re-examined immediately. This score can also be observed in cows with milk fever.

1



Faeces are watery thin and not truly recognizable as faeces.

2



Faeces are thin custard-like; faecal structure can be recognized. At dropping they splash wide out on the floor.

3



Faeces are thick and custard-like. They make a light plopping sound when being dropped on the floor. They make a well-circumscribed pad that spreads and has the thickness of about 2 cm.

4



Stiff faeces are observed. They make a heavy plopping sound when being dropped. They make a well-circumscribed pad that piles in rings and spreads out very little.

5



Stiff faeces in balls, looks like horse faeces. A boot sole profile is left when stepped on.

## Colic

Displaying abdominal pain (colic) is uncommon in the bovine, but may be associated with intestinal disease. This may be seen by a cow kicking at her abdomen, repeatedly lying down and standing up or increased vocalisation.

## **Teeth**

Audible teeth grinding is a sign of pain in cattle.

## **Eyes**

Discharge from the eye is normally noticed as wetness or staining on the cheek below the eye and is usually a sign of inflammation within the eye. The eye being closed, particularly if the animal is outside, is a sign of pain in the eye. The conjunctiva (membrane surrounding the eye) should be a pale pink colour; if they are reddened this may be a sign of inflammation. The surface of the eye should be smooth and transparent; any defects in the surface or cloudiness under the surface of the eye needs prompt veterinary advice.

## **Respiratory Tract**

**Nasal discharge** – A small amount of clear nasal discharge may be normal. Cloudy nasal discharge is usually secondary to infectious disease. Bloody discharge may be due to trauma in the nose or may represent upper or lower respiratory tract disease.

**Respiration Rate** – A healthy cow will have a respiration rate of 24 – 48 breaths per minute (measured by watching her sides move out with each inhale, or in winter can be measured by watching the cow's breath from the nose). An increased respiratory rate can represent stress, or pain, or may be a sign of respiratory disease. If cows get too hot, they may pant to increase heat loss through evaporation; cows panting at over 100 breaths per minute are under severe heat stress.

## **Reproductive Tract**

Any vaginal discharge should be clear and colourless. Blood is sometimes visible when a cow is on heat. Fetal membranes hanging from the vulva are often the first sign of abortion.

# **THE LAND**

## **Forage**

Assessing the forage quality and quantity is an essential part of a Super Lookerer's duty

Grass at the proper height will directly influence animal nutrition. Cows will not work much longer than 8 hours to forage and they will not eat around their own manure. Dexters are browsers as well as grazers so will eat leaves and green stems from saplings, hedges and trees.

Equipped with a long and dexterous tongue the cow wraps its tongue around plant parts and pulls the food into its mouth where it is placed between its lower jaw and a pad on the upper. Once in the mouth the cow swings its head to sever the plant parts and chews the food partly before swallowing. Later the cow will chew and grind it again (ruminate). Due to the design of the cow's lips, teeth and jaw a cow can't easily get closer than 5cm from the soil. An ideal height of grass is about 15cm.

Measuring swards is useful for achieving efficient grazing. Cattle should go into a paddock when the sward is 10-14cm and come out once it is grazed down to 5-6cm. A general rule of thumb is: Cows go in when the grass is the height of a beer can; cows go out when it is the height of a golf ball.

Not all available forage in a pasture is used. Some of the forage is trampled or fouled by urine or manure and remains uneaten. Cattle defecate 11-12 times daily and urinate 8-11 times daily. Dung pats cover about 0.9m<sup>2</sup> and urine patches 0.3-0.4m<sup>2</sup>.

### **Mineral Supplements**

The land that cattle graze may be deficient in certain vitamins and minerals. It is advisable to have a general purpose mineral bucket available all year and a high magnesium bucket in the spring to prevent the occurrence of grass tetany. I will provide one bucket of each for each group (the general purpose has a yellow label and the magnesium one is blue), so please inform me when either one is getting low.

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