

RECORDING DOCILITY SCORES

Docility is a trait of tremendous importance to beef producers, backgrounders, feedlotters and processors. Economic loss from poor temperament cattle can be quite large, whilst the associated risks for cattle handlers are unacceptable in today's workplace environments. Certainly, the easiest way to get a bad reputation is producing cattle that are hard to handle. Thankfully, docility is also a highly heritable trait that is easily recorded and improved genetically.

Docility scores can only be taken from weaner cattle. Too much handling post weaning reduces the variation in docility scoring and influences the level of management effect on scores. Animals may be docility scored using either a crush test or a yard test. Crush tests involve each animal being restrained in the crush for approx. 30 seconds before being released. Yard tests involve holding each animal individually in a small yard with the handler attempting to hold the animal in a corner or similar for approx. 30 seconds.

Breeders should record whether animals were crush tested or yard tested. When recording docility scores, it is important that animals are all assessed consistently. This is best achieved if all animals in each contemporary group are measured by the same individual. Animals that have been handled differently post weaning should be assigned to different "management" groups.

1. DOCILE	Mild disposition, gentle and easily handled, stands and moves slowly during handling undisturbed, settled, somewhat dull, does not pull on headgate when in crush, exits crush calmly.
2. RESTLESS	Quieter than average, but may be stubborn during processing. May try to backout of chute or pull back on headgate. Some flicking of tail. Exits chute promptly.
3. NERVOUS	Typical temperament is manageable, but nervous and impatient. A moderate amount of struggling, movement and tail flicking. Repeated pushing and pulling on headgate. Exits chute briskly.
4. FLIGHTY	Jumpy and out of control, quivers and struggles violently. May bellow and froth at the mouth. Continuous tail flicking. Defecates and urinates during processing. Frantically runs fence line and may jump when penned individually. Exhibits long flight distance and exits chute wildly.
5. AGGRESSIVE	Maybe similar to score 4, but with added aggressive behaviour, fearfulness, extreme agitation, and continuous movement which may include jumping and bellowing while in chute. Exits chute frantically and may exhibit attack behaviour when handled alone.
6. VERY AGGRESSIVE	Extremely aggressive temperament. Thrashes about or attacks wildly when confined in small, tight places. Pronounced attack behaviour.