

Health and Welfare Checkpoints

Alert, active attitude

- distracted attitude: indicates poor health, low energy status and possibly rumen acidosis

Clear, bright eyes

- deep-set eyes: the cow is sick/dehydrated

Clean nostrils

- mucus with pus/blood and skin injuries: skin of the nose inflamed due to virus or cold
- clear mucus doesn't tell you much

Closed mouth

- some drooling: usually hunger
- lot of drooling: swallowing problems or mouth pain
- coughing: due to cold air, dust or disease

Strong rumination activity

- reduced chewing: diet lacks effective fibre
- spitting out the cud: tooth problems, prickly bits in the feed
- normal: 55 to 75 chews per cud

Undamaged knees with full hair covering

- bare knees: scraping on ground when getting up
- swollen knees: bruising when getting up, lack of space in cubicle

Sound, fully weight-bearing hooves

- tiptoeing, standing on tips of hooves
- injured or swollen coronary band
- eczema or scabs in interdigital space

Steady breathing

- rapid and shallow: heat stress or pain. Sometimes at start of rumination period as well.
- normal: 10 to 30 times a minute

Full belly

- belly too empty: hasn't eaten enough last week
- Take account of the size of the calf, if any.

Straight back

- arched back: painful hooves or physical wear and tear
- injuries: usually bruising against cubicle partition

Good rumen fill

- too empty: hasn't eaten enough today
- no discernable layered structure (apple shape): not enough fibre in diet

Optimum condition

- too thin: inadequate energy intake
- too fat: excessive energy intake
- normal: good flesh cover with a little fat

Good condition leads to improved disease resistance, fertility and health around calving (pay attention to breed).

Correct temperature

- too high (> 39.0°C): fever
 - too low (< 38.0°C): milk fever or serious illness
 - normal: between 38.0 and 38.5°C
- Take temperature rectally.

Clean hindquarters

- dung on both sides of rump: dung too thin
- asymmetrical soiling: environment too dirty

Soft, symmetrical udder

- hard: due to oedema around calving, or mastitis (painful)
- enlarged quarter: active mastitis
- shrunken quarter: previous mastitis

Undamaged hocks with full hair covering

- bare hocks: scraping on cubicle floor; lack of grip
- thick hocks: lack of space, cubicle floor too hard
- scabs: inflammation due to dirt or moisture

Flat but formed, smooth dung

- long stems: insufficient rumination activity
 - not too loose or too firm, always relate with ration components (e.g. grazing) and lactation stage (e.g. dry vs peak lactation)
- Use the dung feedback to assess the diet: feeding methods, feed intake, digestion, water intake and health. Discuss with your nutritionist when the dung doesn't seem optimal.

