
DARK CUTTERS

Dark cutters (dark red meat) occur mainly when animals are stressed just prior to slaughter. While this darker meat has no difference in taste than other cherry red coloured meat, it has a shorter shelf life and is usually ground for hamburger. In young fed cattle, dark cutters are down-graded to a B4, which may result in a \$40-60/cwt discount. Consumers will not purchase dark red meat simply because of the colour.

Contributing factors to stress include fluctuating climatic temperatures, fasting, rough handling, mixing strange cattle together, some implant programs, MGA withdrawal in heifers, breed, gender, stags, temperment, holding times at the plant, and transport time. In the 1999 audit, 1.2% of the carcasses were dark cutters.

PREVENTION

- ✓ Review loading and unloading procedures, transport, and holding times at packing plants
- ✓ Review implant programs to ensure proper use and management
- ✓ Review MGA feeding practices to ensure heifers don't withdraw from MGA too long prior to slaughter, and go into heat
- ✓ Review and improve cattle handling practices
- ✓ Castrate bulls properly to avoid stags
- ✓ Cull wild temperment breeding animals, this can be inherited
- ✓ Keep cattle on feed up to slaughter
- ✓ Consider the use of electrolytes prior to slaughter or while on hold at the plant if dark cutters persist

produced by CCA; developed by Dr. Joyce Van Donkersgoed

PREVENTION OF BRUISING AND DARK CUTTERS



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difference right now
and improve your
returns!**

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BRUISING

Bruises on carcasses reflect poor cattle handling practices. Tissue that is deeply bruised must be trimmed and bruised primals are devalued at processing. Bruising is also indicative of animal welfare issues.

In the 1999 beef quality audit, the number and severity of bruises were reduced from the 1995 audit, suggesting improvements in cattle handling and transport. However, bruises were still found on 54% of the carcasses, showing that additional changes are needed. Of these bruises, 68% were minor, resulting in little or no trim; 28% were major, with 1.5 lbs of trim being removed, and 4% were critical, with 3 lbs of trim taken off.



Carcasses from cows had the highest number of bruises and the most severe. This can be attributed to a number of potential factors: bony frames with less fat cover, inadequate precautions taken during transport; more easily agitated during handling and more frequent stops and mixing during trip to slaughter plants. Overall economic losses from bruising were estimated at \$4.3 million.

PREVENTION

- ✓ Handle cattle quietly, slowly, and humanely at all times
 - ✓ Design facilities to encourage easy movement of cattle based on their natural instincts
 - ✓ Design loading and unloading areas properly
 - ✓ Restrain cattle properly prior to handling, treating, implanting, castrating, dehorning, or pregnancy checks
 - ✓ When removing cattle from a pen, avoid moving a single animal. Rather, move at least 2 or 3 at a time to limit spooking
 - ✓ Raise or remove low-hanging bars and remove bolts sticking out of fences; maintain proper pressure on hydraulic chutes; consider using livestock safety cushions on sharp corners of facilities and in livestock trucks
 - ✓ Place grids on the floor in front of chutes to reduce slipping
 - ✓ Don't overload crowding tubs
 - ✓ Dehorn calves prior to weaning or use polled bulls for breeding
 - ✓ Load transport trucks carefully, paying attention to the number, frame size, and weight of cattle so that they are loaded appropriately
 - ✓ Use straw or shale on floors of transport trucks to prevent slipping, and consider using trucks with wide tail gates
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