

Recording Docility Scores



TIP SHEET

Docility EBVs are estimates of genetic differences between animals in temperament. Docility EBVs are calculated from docility scores recorded on animals when the animals are between 60 and 400 days of age.

WHY SHOULD DOCILITY BE RECORDED?

Docility in cattle is the way the animals behave when being handled by humans or put in an unusual environment such as being separated from the mob in a small yard. What we define as poor docility is a survival trait in the wild – fear of anything unusual and the desire to escape. In domesticated cattle it is exhibited as flightiness. Importantly, docility is a highly heritable trait and can be improved genetically.

Docility EBVs can assist beef producers to identify those animals with poor temperament, allowing them to be removed from breeding programs. More docile animals (i.e. better temperament) can lead to improved ease of handling and safety for beef producers.

HOW DO I RECORD DOCILITY SCORES?

Docility EBVs are calculated from temperament scores recorded on animals when they are between 60 and 400 days of age.

The recommended time of scoring is at weaning or shortly afterwards. As an animal's temperament relates strongly to previous handling experiences (positive and/or negative) and handling frequency, it is best to record docility scores before too much human interaction has occurred. Scoring docility at weaning has the additional advantage of minimising variation in handling between animals to be scored.

Animals can be scored for temperament using either a yard or crush test.

Yard Test: The calves are individually put into a small square yard and the handler should attempt to hold the animal in one corner for ~30 seconds.

Crush Test: The calves are put up a race and individually held in the crush for ~30 seconds.

When using either test, the behaviour of animals should be observed and scored using the following criteria:

Score	Code	Description
1	Docile	Mild disposition, gentle and easily handled, stands and moves slowly during handling, undisturbed, settled, somewhat dull, exits crush calmly.
2	Restless	Quieter than average but slightly restless, may be stubborn during handling, may try to back out of crush, some flicking of tail, exits crush promptly.
3	Nervous	Manageable but nervous and impatient, a moderate amount of struggling, movement and tail flicking, exits crush briskly.
4	Flighty	Jumpy and out of control, quivers and struggles violently, may bellow and froth at mouth, continuous tail flicking, defecates and urinates during handling, frantically runs the fenceline and may jump when penned individually, exhibits long flight distance and exits crush wildly.
5	Aggressive	May be similar to score 4 but with added aggressive behaviour, fearful, extreme agitation, continuous movement which may include jumping and bellowing while in crush, exits crush frantically and may exhibit attack behaviour when handled alone.



WHAT CONSIDERATIONS SHOULD BE MADE WHEN RECORDING DOCILITY SCORES FOR BREEDPLAN?

- There needs to be some variation in the scores for them to be used effectively by the BREEDPLAN analysis. That is, scoring all animals in a group with a docility score of 1 will not identify any genetic differences in docility.
- BREEDPLAN can accept half scores if animals exhibit behaviour which is intermediate to the above scores.
- Animals should be assigned a different management group if they have had a different level of handling prior to scoring.
- The method of scoring used (i.e. crush or yard) should be specified when submitting the docility scores.
- When recording docility, it is important that both a consistent scoring method is used and the same person scores all animals that are being assessed in the herd on that particular day.

HOW DO I SUBMIT DOCILITY SCORES?

Docility scores should be submitted directly to your BREEDPLAN processing centre using any of the following methods:

- The BREEDPLAN paper performance recording forms (forms can be requested by contacting staff at your BREEDPLAN processing centre).
- The BREEDPLAN compatible Microsoft Excel template (available to download in the [Help Centre](#) on the BREEDPLAN website).
- A BREEDPLAN compatible herd recording computer program.
- The web services area offered on some Breed Society/Association websites.

Please see the [Methods of Submitting Data to BREEDPLAN](#) tip sheet, available in the [Help Centre](#) on the BREEDPLAN website, for further information.

For more information regarding how to record docility scores or Docility EBVs in general, please contact staff at your BREEDPLAN processing centre.

