



Caring for cattle in Australian feedlots

KEY POINTS

- Animal welfare is the most important issue in the Australian feedlot sector.
- To maintain the confidence of all stakeholders, the industry recognises that that we need to continually improve our practices over time whilst being transparent about our systems, training and practices.
- Australian lot feeders undertake an array of activities to ensure good animal welfare outcomes are achieved. The primary mechanism to deliver good animal welfare is the industry's independently audited quality assurance program, the National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS). Importantly, whilst lot feeders have a close affinity with their cattle, there is also a commercial incentive to undertake good animal welfare as well cared for cattle are healthier, grow faster and produce higher quality beef.
- The Australian feedlot industry invests in research, development and extension programs to ensure lot feeders have access to the latest science and information to foster and encourage adoption of best animal husbandry practices promoting continuous improvement in animal welfare outcomes.
- The Australian feedlot industry encourages lot feeders to undertake both formal and informal training in animal welfare through accredited vocational education courses and industry led workshops.
- The Australian feedlot industry supports the development and implementation of nationally consistent animal welfare legislation. Lot feeders will be annually audited against these requirements via NFAS once they are legislated.

BACKGROUND

Like all production systems, feedlots are not perfect. However, the industry is well aware of its weaknesses and has put in place comprehensive systems, training, standards, and research, development and extension arrangements to manage and improve such issues. The industry is proud of these arrangements and is open and transparent regarding its practices and activities as demonstrated by feedlot tours, regular meetings with the RSPCA and major retailers; along with our communication efforts.

A key strength of the Australian beef industry are its systems that underpin its reputation as a producer of beef that is free from disease, safe and healthy, and produced under world leading animal husbandry practices. Working to maintain and promote this enviable position is one of the Australian Lot Feeders' Association's (ALFA's) key roles.

The Australian feedlot industry recognises that, unless it continually improves its animal welfare performance and ensures that it is proactive and transparent in the care of its animals, there is a potential that the industry's social license to operate will be removed. This could damage the reputation of the industry, impact upon the markets for its products and potentially lead to an increase in regulatory costs.

In Australia, all feedlot cattle spend between 85-90% of their lives in an extensive pasture environment. The average time they spend on a feedlot is between 50-120 days. Feedlot cattle are placed in a yard of up to 6,000m² in size (i.e. around the size of 14 basketball courts) - enough space for them to exhibit all their normal behavioural characteristics such as exercising, socialising, resting and chewing their cud. They are closely monitored each day and plentiful quantities of clean fresh water and feed are available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.

How does the industry manage animal welfare?

Given the high level of supervision by feedlot managers and stock people, animal welfare issues in feedlots can be identified early and managed quickly and effectively. These key staff members are specifically trained in animal welfare, husbandry and handling along with quickly identifying any animals that may appear sick so that they can be isolated from other animals and treated as soon as possible.

There are many examples of every day practices on feedlots that ensure good animal health and welfare outcomes including:

- Daily monitoring of all animals to check for injury and disease;
- Use of trained and competent staff;

- Use of low stress handling practices and well maintained and designed facilities;
- Use of consultant veterinarians to oversee feedlot animal health programs;
- Use of animal nutritionists to formulate the appropriate mix of energy, protein, fibre, minerals and vitamins.

As feedlot cattle are also protected from floods, fire, droughts and predators; mortality levels are on average lower than in extensive grazing systems.

ALFA undertakes a number of activities to ensure the continuous improvement in animal welfare outcomes within the cattle feedlot industry including through research, development, extension and education programs; all underpinned by the industry's quality assurance scheme, NFAS.

1. Quality assurance

The feedlot industry was the first agriculturally based industry in Australia to embrace quality assurance and has had in place the National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS) since 1994. This program encompasses the vast majority of feedlots in the sector and covers animal health & welfare, environmental conservation and food safety. NFAS requirements far exceed those required under legislation. It is independently owned and managed to industry and through annual third party auditing, every NFAS accredited feedlot is checked to ensure it meets its legal requirements as well as industry's high standards for animal care. In addition, feedlots must undertake regular internal animal welfare audits to ensure they are meeting industry's requirements and expectations.

Continuous updating of NFAS with relevant scientific and technical information enables industry to demonstrate that it operates in accordance with the increasing requirements and expectations of consumers, markets, Government and the wider community. The industry supports the development and implementation of nationally consistent animal welfare legislation. When the [Australian Animal Welfare Standards for Cattle](#) become legislated, they will be picked by NFAS with feedlots subsequently audited against them.

2. Research and development

Through the utilisation of industry levies, ALFA oversees investment in research and development (R & D) programs to ensure lot feeders have access to (and adopt) the latest science and information regarding animal health and welfare practices. Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) is responsible for the management of animal welfare research and development projects with the ultimate aim of providing tools and knowledge to lot feeders to help them improve the wellbeing of their cattle and address issues of community concern.

3. Extension and education

Lot feeders have a responsibility to incorporate developments in research and standards into their property animal welfare plans and on-farm practices. ALFA works with MLA and other organisations to develop education and change management strategies to encourage the uptake of the latest research findings by lot feeders through development of tools and resources to support continued improvement in animal welfare. These are supported by both formal and informal training packages for feedlot staff including low stress animal handling courses, animal welfare workshops delivered by industry and welfare experts, the use of industry funded on the ground extension staff and presentations at ALFA conferences.

Lot feeders are kept informed of changes to animal welfare legislation, technology and management practices through ALFA's various communication channels. These include fortnightly newsletters, the bi-monthly journal, conferences, workshops, regular emails and social media. Industry excellence in the management of animal welfare is also recognised, encouraged and fostered through the annual [Feedlot of the Year Award](#).

CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION

Bridget Peachey
 Manager, Policy and Projects
 Australian Lot Feeders' Association
 Ph: 02 9290 3700
 Email: bridget.peachey@feedlots.com.au