






Raising the welfare standards for dairy cattle

	Requirement	Why is it important	SPCA Certified Standard	Code of Welfare - Minimum Standards
 <div>CATTLE HEALTH</div>	Food and water	High quality and sufficient food and water help dairy cattle maintain good health. It is important that the food, and the way it is fed, minimise the risk of nutritional disorders such as bloat, acidosis, or mineral and vitamin deficiencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cattle fed at a rate and in a manner that provides for their nutritional and health requirements at all stages of life and production.Trace element supplementation programme is in place.Free access to clean, palatable water at all times.Water quality is tested at least every three years and for any new water sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Sufficient quantities of food provided to maintain good health, meet physiological needs, and minimise metabolic and nutritional disorders.Trace element supplementation not specifically required.Access to a daily supply of drinking water sufficient to meet their needs and that is not harmful to health.No water quality testing required.
	Body condition score (BCS)	Keeping the body condition of dairy cattle within a certain range ensures they are healthy, able to cope with weather extremes, and able to give birth without difficulties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">BCS to be kept between 4 and 6 (on a scale from 1-10). Action required if it falls below 4.BCS must be assessed for each cow four times each year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Urgent action must be taken if BCS falls below 3 (on a scale of 1-10).Regular BC scoring not required.
	Calf feeding	Calves need adequate amounts of colostrum to ensure they have the best start in life as it supports their immune system and helps protect them from becoming sick. Calves should receive sufficient liquid feed more than once a day to allow them to grow, be healthy, and to meet their behavioural need to suckle. Calves that receive insufficient milk will be hungry and will not grow well. Inability to express their sucking motivation will also be frustrating to calves and can lead to abnormal oral behaviours such as sucking on other calves (cross-sucking).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Hand-reared calves are given at least 10 % of their bodyweight of warm colostrum within first six hours after birth, a further 2-4L between 6-12 hours.After the first day, liquid feed must be fed at 15-20 % of bodyweight in at least three feeds a day. From four weeks to weaning in at least two feeds a day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Sufficient colostrum to ensure calf welfare.Suitable liquid feed until rumen developed sufficiently to utilise solids as sole feed source. No specific requirements on amount of feed or number of daily feeds.
	Mastitis and Lameness	Mastitis is a painful inflammation of the udder and lame cows experience discomfort and/or pain when putting pressure on their feet. Early detection of these conditions and quick treatment will help to reduce pain and improve welfare outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cows with signs of mastitis must be treated immediately, including with pain relief.Lame animals must be treated, including with pain relief.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">No specific mention.
 <div>ENVIRONMENT</div>	Pasture access	Housing dairy cattle can be beneficial, such as protecting them from extreme weather, but prolonged housing can lead to welfare problems. Pasture access allows housed dairy cattle to engage in normal behaviours such as grazing, gives them some choice over what food they eat and where to rest, and provides opportunity to access shade and shelter, thereby promoting positive mental experiences and welfare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Keeping dairy cattle in housing without access to pasture is not allowed unless in exceptional circumstances for short periods of time to protect animal welfare (for example during weather extremes).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">No time limit for keeping dairy cattle in housing.No requirement for grazing/pasture access.
	Shade and shelter	Provision of shade and shelter ensures that animals can choose and decide whether to stand in the sun, wind, or rain, or out of it to avoid discomfort and heat and cold stress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Access to shade and shelter at all times.Calves not kept with their dams are provided with shelter and a substantial amount of suitable bedding to keep them comfortable, warm, and dry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide dairy cattle with the means to minimise the effects of adverse weather. Shade and shelter not required specifically.Newborn calves removed from dam, calves that are not suckling their mother, and sick animals must have access to shelter.
	Milking	<p>To ensure milking is not stressful, it is important that dairy cattle that are lactating for the first time are introduced to the milking system over several sessions in a calm and gentle manner. This will allow them to get used to the milking machinery and having their udders handled to foster a comfortable, positive milking experience.</p> <p>Cows like to walk at their own pace, with their head down to see where they place their feet. Ensuring that cows are not overcrowded and are not physically pushed by gates to encourage movement through the milking yards therefore reduces stress and injuries. It also gives cows the space and time to arrange themselves into their preferred milking order.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A plan must be in place and implemented to familiarise dairy cattle with the milking system before their first lactation.Cows must be able to move comfortably and safely with their heads down to see where they are walking to minimise overcrowding and stress.Backing and top gates that use an electric shock to encourage cow movement are not allowed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">No specific requirements for familiarisation to the milking system.Use minimum force when moving dairy cattle.No requirements regarding backing and top gates.
 <div>BEHAVIOUR</div>	Enrichment	Enrichment makes an animal's environment more interesting, encouraging them to explore and allowing them to engage in normal behaviours to meet their mental and physical needs. Enrichment for cattle include objects on which cattle can groom or scratch, which helps to relieve itches and which they love doing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Access to objects on which to scratch or groom provided within housing and all pastures, such as trees or fixed structures such as brushes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Enrichment not required.
	Weaning calves	<p>Weaning is a stressful time for calves and should therefore be done gradually, using low-stress methods such as keeping calves in stable groups with access to familiar feed.</p> <p>It is important that calves are not weaned too early as their rumen must be able to digest pasture sufficiently before milk is withdrawn.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Calves must not be weaned before eight weeks of age and must consistently eat appropriate volumes of pasture or meal daily.Calves must be weaned gradually over at least 10-14 days using low-stress methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Suitable liquid feed until rumen can utilise pasture/other solids as sole feed source.No specific requirements on how to wean.
	Handling	Regular handling of animals in a manner that is calm, gentle, and that takes the animals' behaviour into consideration will reduce fear, anxiety, and stress. Positive human-animal interactions also make it easier to handle and move animals. Appropriate human-animal interactions may even be enriching for animals and can create positive mental experiences (for both animals and humans!).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Low-stress handling and husbandry techniques to be used.Electric prodder use is prohibited.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Handled in a manner to minimise risk of pain, injury, or distress. Use minimum force when moving dairy cattle.Electric prodder use allowed on cattle weighing over 150kg, on muscled hindquarters only.
 <div>CONSUMER ASSURANCES</div>	Animal welfare audits	Announced and particularly unannounced audits ensure transparency, integrity, and credibility of standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Independently audited by an external company, annually and at least one additional unannounced audit/year. Additionally, SPCA Certified visit every single farm when they join the programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Animal welfare audits not required.
	Free from sub-therapeutic antibiotics	Using antibiotics where there is no diagnosed disease, condition, or microorganism (bacteria etc) - can lead to antibiotic resistance and means that healthy animals are unnecessarily treated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Use of prescribed therapeutic antibiotics for the treatment of a specific, diagnosed condition, disease, or injury only.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Medication can only be used in accordance with registration conditions, manufacturer's instructions or professional advice. No specific mention on antibiotic use.