

IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS CATTLE TRAITS IN THE NATIONAL LIVESTOCK REPORTING SYSTEM

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This paper reports on a study (McKiernan 2001) to quantify price movements relative to cattle traits reported in the live cattle market. It was conducted for the National Livestock Reporting Service (NLRs), which reports on livestock sales across Australia. Live cattle traits reported are: Liveweight, Muscle Score and Fat Score.

Reporting of price movements in the livestock marketplace is extremely important to the cattle industry for: clearer recognition of market specifications; acknowledgment of price premium and discounts due to differences in criteria (animal trait); demonstrate the incentive for meeting market specifications. Producers can then design and implement breeding and production programs to more fully satisfy market requirements and maximise returns from their marketable product.

Seven market categories were analysed. Within each of these categories 1 year's data were analysed from summary reports for all of NSW markets reported from May 2000 to May 2001. This constituted analysis of reports of over 1 million cattle sold in the NSW live market during that period.

For each trait studied all other traits were held constant. Therefore a difference between price received for a weight category within market category for example was only compared when fat score and muscle score was held constant (animal class) within that same market category. The same applied for all other comparisons within traits. Average price variation due to change in trait was determined by averaging differences between animal class within market category.

Table 1. Average liveweight price premiums or discounts (cents/kg) due to changes in class or score of trait reported within cattle market category.

Market category	Liveweight class	Reported trait	
		Muscle score	Fat score
Cows	4.7	11.0	7.1
Yearling Steers	2.1	15.9	5.8
Yearling Restockers	3.9	18.1	1.7
Yearling Heifers	3.1	15.8	5.4
Steers	0.9	12.7	6.5
Feeder Steers	4.2	9.7	3.2
Vealers	14.1	14.9	4.1
Average	4.7	14.0	4.8

Generally the heavier the liveweight class within category, the higher the price, except for the Vealer category which preferred lighter weight cattle. Across all categories, cattle with a higher muscle score attracted a premium. As fat score increased from low to high (1 to 6), price improved until fat score 4 or 5 was reached, depending on market category and then a discount occurred.

These results demonstrate that the biggest determinant of price variation within all market categories is Muscle Score. Muscle Score is being paid for and signals are being given to the cattle industry in terms of preferred animal. The implications of this to the cattle industry is that they should endeavour to improve muscle score to attract premium prices and ensure they deliver the correct weight and fat requirements depending on the market category.

MCKIERNAN, W.A. (2001). A report to the National Livestock Service.

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