




STANDARDS	 RSPCA	UK LEGAL MINIMUM	 RED TRACTOR	 SOIL ASSOCIATION ORGANIC	WELFARE IMPACT
YEAR OF PUBLICATION	2026		2025	2025	
ENVIRONMENT					
SPACE REQUIREMENTS (LOOSE HOUSING)	Total area of 2–11sqm, from <100kg to >800kg.	The freedom of movement of animals, having regard to their species and in accordance with good practice and scientific knowledge, must not be restricted in such a way as to cause them unnecessary suffering or injury.	Requirement of space to be able to lie simultaneously, rise, turn around and stretch without difficulty. Recommend area of 1.5–11sqm, from <100kg to >800kg.	Total area 10.5sqm (not inclusive of pasture).	Sufficient space is required to enable cattle to perform a wide range of important natural behaviours, such as walking, self-grooming and social interaction. Increasing space allows cattle to avoid aggressive herdmates.
CUBICLE SPACE	5% more cubicles than cows. 6sqm of 'loafing' space.	No requirement.	As many cubicles as cows. Housing must be of a sufficient size.	Expects 5% more cubicles than cows. 10.5sqm total space required.	Dairy cows tend to perform behaviours as a herd, meaning many cows may lie down at a similar time. The extra cubicles gives cows choice of where to rest, e.g. in a cooler area of the shed, and who to rest next to.
BULL PENS	Resting area of 16sqm+, additional exercise area of 25sqm. Must have sight of and physical contact with other cattle.	No requirement.	No requirement.	Indoor area of 10sqm, additional area of 30sqm. Must have sight of other cattle.	Bulls are large animals who need sufficient space to move around freely, and carry out normal behaviours. They are also social, and providing opportunities for social interaction is important for their welfare.
ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT	Enrichment required for adult cattle, and calves from six weeks of age. One brush per 60 cows.	No requirement.	No requirement.	No requirement.	Brushes allow cows to carry out grooming behaviours, helping with coat maintenance and cleanliness. Calf enrichment promotes exploration of the environment and may encourage normal calf behaviours such as play.
PASTURE ACCESS	Adult cattle must have access to pasture for 120 days a year (with allowances for health, weather and reproductive status). Heifers must have access to pasture before calving.	No requirement.	No requirement.	Permanent access to pasture, other than in winter and 3 months prior to slaughter.	Cattle value access to pasture, which provides them with extra space to exercise, lets them space out from herdmates, and gives them the ability to perform the natural behaviour of grazing.
HUSBANDRY					
FEED	Feed space of 600mm per adult cow (buildings pre-July 2020) and 750mm per adult cow (post-July 2020). Transition cows: 1,000mm per cow. Nutritional plan required, reviewed 6-monthly, with sufficient fibre to prevent acidosis.	Harmful effects of competition must be minimised. Recommend feed space allowances from 550–750mm.	Either nutritional plan or body condition scoring, with sufficient feed to maintain rumen function.	No trough space specified. Must minimise bullying. Feed must be at least 60% forage.	Feed space impacts on welfare through competition, especially when feed is supplied in a ration rather than ad-lib. 'Displacements', where individuals are pushed off food, can reduce or delay intake, and cause hunger.
WATER	10% of the herd must be able to drink at one time. 450–700mm drinking space per animal.	No requirement.	10% of the herd must be able to drink at one time. No space requirement.	10% of the herd must be able to drink at one time. No space requirement.	Dairy cattle require large volumes of water, due to the high water content of milk. This standard allows cows to have good access to water and limits competition.
BREEDING TECHNOLOGIES	Artificial insemination only allowed to be carried out by a vet or skilled and trained person with a recognised standard. Embryo transfer not permitted other than in exceptional circumstances with proven welfare benefit.	Natural or artificial breeding or breeding procedures which cause, or are likely to cause, suffering or injury to any of the animals concerned, must not be practised. This does not preclude the use of natural or artificial breeding procedures that are likely to cause minimal or momentary suffering or injury or that might necessitate interventions which would not cause lasting injury.	Must be satisfied that any contractors used for artificial insemination are competent.	No use of breeding hormones. Any person carrying out artificial insemination should be trained and competent. Embryo transfer prohibited.	The use of some breeding techniques can cause discomfort or pain for cattle and require extended handling, so must be considered against any welfare gain. Standards requiring training or skills to carry out these procedures, and restricting which methods are used, help protect welfare.
VET CARE	Must have a detailed Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan, reviewed annually. Quarterly vet visits. Health plan must include several common conditions.	No vet inspection frequency set.	Must have a Livestock Health Plan. Vet visits at least annually, and a written annual livestock health and performance review.	Must have a health plan and strongly recommends consultation with vet. Should review annually where any improvements can be made.	Routine vet visits and a written health plan allow proactive health management of a herd, where farmers and vets can focus on health conditions specific to the farm. These can help reduce the frequency of health issues, and therefore poor welfare for cattle.
CALF WELFARE					
SPACE ALLOWANCES	Fully bedded housing. Required space (sqm) by weight: 2.0 for <100kg 3.5 for 100–200kg 4.0 for 200–250kg 4.5 for 250–300kg 5.5 for 300–350kg	Required space (sqm) by weight: 1.5 for <150kg 2.0 for 150–200kg 3.0 for 200kg+ Must be able to turn around, groom, stand up, lie down and rest without hindrance.	Required space (sqm) by weight: 1.5 for 50–84kg 1.8 for 85–140kg 2.4 for 140–200kg 3.0 for 200–300kg 3.95 for 300–400kg	Required space (sqm) by weight: 2.6 for <100kg 4.4 for 100–199kg 7 for 200–350kg	Calves show play behaviours, which include running, and develop by exploring their environment. Space allowances can give room for them to be mobile and active, and be close to or distant from penmates.
FEEDING AND WEANING	At least 3 litres of colostrum within first 6 hours of life. 8 litres/900g of milk powder per day for 8 weeks; over 2 feeds for the first 42 days. Must be teat-fed. Weaning no sooner than 8 weeks of age.	Milk feeds at least twice daily for the first month of life.	Colostrum within first 6 hours of life. No milk volume specified. Legal requirements for feeding twice daily for first month. No requirement for teat feeding. Weaning no sooner than 5 weeks of age.	Natural, organic milk, and colostrum, of 'sufficient' quantity. No requirement for teat feeding. Weaning from 12 weeks of age.	Colostrum is vital for health as it provides early immunity to calves. Having requirements for milk volume promotes good health and development. Teat feeding fulfils the motivation to suckle. Weaning at an appropriate age impacts both growth and stress in calves.
GROUP HOUSING	Calves must be paired or grouped by three weeks of age (recommend by one week).	Calves must be paired or grouped by 8 weeks of age.	Calves must be paired or grouped by 8 weeks of age.	Calves must be paired or grouped by 7 days of age.	Calves are social animals who engage in social play, cope better with stressful events in groups, and are motivated to be with other calves. Group housing promotes welfare on these points, but individual monitoring is more difficult so calves must be closely observed.
CASTRATION AND DISBUDDING	Castration: long acting pain relief required for all methods. Disbudding: caustic paste not permitted; local anaesthetic and long-acting pain relief required.	Castration: rubber ring permitted up to 1 week of age; no pain relief required. Other methods: pain relief required over 2 months of age. Disbudding: caustic paste permitted up to 1 week of age. Other methods: anaesthetic but no long-acting pain relief.	Castration: no pain relief required for rubber ring method. Disbudding: caustic paste permitted; no requirement for local anaesthetic. Pain relief required.	Castration and disbudding must not be routine, so requires choosing breeds where they are not necessary. Pain relief and/or local anaesthetic is required for all types.	Castration and disbudding are painful procedures, both at the time of the event and afterwards as the tissue dies off. Where these are carried out, pain relief can reduce the welfare impact.
TRANSPORT					
TRANSPORT REQUIREMENTS	Journeys under 8 hours only. Vehicles must have bedding. Electric goads prohibited. Legal minimum space per animal. Loading ramp no more than 20% incline.	Space allowances of 0.3–1.6sqm per animal. Maximum transport times of 28 hours, with a one-hour rest break halfway. Loading ramp no more than 50% incline.	Legal maximum stocking densities, ramp angle, and journey length (up to 28hrs with a rest break). Electric goads prohibited.	Journey duration must be kept to a minimum; journeys over 8 hours must be justified. Legal maximum stocking densities. Electric goads prohibited. No mention of ramp incline.	Transport is a stressful event for cattle, with fatigue increasing with length of journey. This makes maximum journey times important for protecting welfare. Other factors such as angles of loading ramps affect the risk of falls, injury and comfort.
MARKETS AND COLLECTION CENTRES	Prohibits both sales at markets and passing through collection centres.	Legislation covering welfare at markets.	Permitted. Detailed standards for both livestock markets and collection centres.	Markets are discouraged but allowed. Specifies that when at market the handling, care and welfare of the animals is the responsibility of the livestock owner. Collection centres should be avoided.	Markets and collection centres pose a number of welfare challenges to cattle. Animals are transported and loaded/unloaded twice, may be mixed with other animals, and are put through the ring – all stressful events. There are disease-spread risks between cattle. Markets are noisy, with lots of people and often dogs present – conditions cattle are likely to find stressful
SLAUGHTER/KILLING METHOD					
PRE-STUN SLAUGHTER	Compulsory that all animals are stunned prior to slaughter.	Exceptions for religious slaughter, which can be not-stunned prior to slaughter.	Compulsory that all animals are stunned prior to slaughter.	Compulsory that all animals are stunned prior to slaughter.	Pre-stunning ensures that an animal is unconscious and cannot feel pain before slaughter and up until the point of death.
SLAUGHTER OF HEAVILY PREGNANT COWS	Not permitted at more than 27 weeks pregnant (except for emergency disease control).	Not permitted at more than 90% gestation (around 37–38 weeks pregnant).	Not permitted at more than 90% gestation (around 37–38 weeks pregnant).	Recommend avoid transport over 65% of gestation (6 months).	Transport to slaughter places heavily pregnant cows under significant stress. The welfare of the foetus can also be affected.
AUDITING					
WELFARE OUTCOME MONITORING	On-farm annual welfare outcome assessment carried out, using the AssureWel protocol for 11 measures of welfare.	Not required.	On-farm animal welfare outcome assessment carried out, using 5 measures of welfare.	On-farm welfare outcome assessment carried out, using 10 measures of welfare.	Welfare outcome measures are animal-based metrics that reflect aspects of their welfare. They include body condition, cleanliness, mortality rates, and levels of castration and disbudding on-farm.