

Animal Care



Fact Sheet: Cattle Assessments

Dairy Farmers of Canada’s on-farm quality assurance program - proAction® - fosters excellent farm practices and a culture of continuous improvement. The Animal Care module includes a key requirement: the cattle assessment. Farmers must have a sample of their milking herds assessed for body condition score; hock, knee and neck scores; and mobility score, and farmers must keep their cattle assessment reports on file for their proAction validations.

Here are answers to some of the frequently asked questions regarding the cattle assessments.

What is the purpose of the cattle assessments?

Cattle assessments provide indicators of general dairy cattle welfare or a systemic overview. Individual herd assessments provide a benchmark for each herd, giving farmers an opportunity to monitor continuous improvement over time.

Who will perform the cattle assessment on my farm?

With the support of provincial associations, Dairy Farmers of Canada (DFC) has entered a second agreement with Holstein Canada to continue to provide cattle assessment services until 2025. Holstein Canada is the sole-service provider in all provinces, except for Saskatchewan where other options are available.

How do I schedule a cattle assessment?

Important: Holstein Canada will contact you to schedule a cattle assessment. You need to respond promptly to Holstein Canada whenever they contact you, whether that is by mail or by phone, to avoid additional scheduling fees.

Farmers in Saskatchewan should contact their provincial producer association if they are interested in other cattle assessment service provider options. This factsheet only describes the scheduling process associated with Holstein Canada’s services.

What is the scheduling process?

Holstein Canada follows the same process used for scheduling Classification services:

- Holstein Canada will target scheduling Cattle Assessments one month before a farmer’s validation due date. For Classification clients, Holstein Canada will also consider a farmer’s Classification schedule and try to schedule both services at the same time.
- Three months in advance, Holstein Canada posts its anticipated schedule by region on its [website](#). Farmers can check this website to monitor when assessors may be in their area.
- Three weeks in advance of being in an area, Holstein Canada sends the farmers due for an assessment in that area a letter informing them that an assessor will be contacting them soon.
If you are not going to be available when the assessor is in your area, you must contact Holstein Canada **immediately, so that they can determine other options for you.*
- Once in the area, the assessor will phone you to schedule the assessment. It is critical that you answer / return the call, as increased fees will apply if you need to re-schedule later.
- Then the assessor arrives and conducts the cattle assessment on the scheduled day.

How often do I need to have a cattle assessment completed?

Cattle assessments must be conducted every two years, and within 24 months prior to a farm's validation. If your herd's results are in the Dark Red zone (<60% scoring acceptable), the frequency will increase to every 12 months.

How are assessors trained?

Ensuring cattle assessments are performed accurately and consistently is critical. Prior to becoming assessors, trainees attend two-and-a-half days of training, which involves both classroom and on-farm sessions. Trainees must then successfully complete an exam before they are authorized to perform cattle assessments on-farm. Assessors are also required to complete additional exams every six months to ensure they maintain scoring accuracy.

What does the cattle assessment report look like?

Once the assessment is complete, the farmer receives a cattle assessment report, which contains details of the scores given to each animal in the sample and a summary of the percentage of cattle with acceptable scores for each measure. The report also includes a Peer Report, which indicates how the herd's results compare to the results from a significant number of herds across Canada. You may receive your Peer Report after the assessor has left the farm, as the assessor needs internet access to generate it.

All reports are available on your farmer account at dairyproaction.ca. For farmers in QC, all reports are available on your PLQ extranet account.

What do my Peer Report results mean?

The Peer Reports show four zones: Green, Yellow, Red and Dark Red. The zones have been established based on the results of the first round of cattle assessments across Canada. The Green, Yellow and two Red zones represent the top, middle and bottom results, respectively. See Table 1 for details.

Green zone = meeting the excellent target. Green means good.

For any results that are in the Green zone, the herd is meeting the current goal.

Yellow zone = caution and a corrective action plan is recommended.

For any results that are in the Yellow zone, the farmer should consider corrective actions and work on continuous improvement.

Red zone = corrective action plan required.

For any results that are in the Red zone, the farmer must document a corrective action plan, in consultation with a dairy professional who must sign the plan, and implement the plan to improve.

Dark Red zone = corrective action plan required and increased cattle assessments are required (i.e. next cattle assessment is due in 12 months with greater numbers of cattle to be assessed).

For any results that are in the Dark Red zone, the farmer must document a corrective action plan, in consultation with a dairy professional who must sign the plan, and implement the plan to improve.

Table 1: Targets for animal-based measures and zone thresholds

Measure	Zones			
	Green Meets excellent target	Yellow Corrective action plan recommended	Red Corrective action plan required	Dark Red Corrective action plan and increased cattle assessments required**
Body Condition Score	≥95%*	80% to <95%	60% to <80%	<60%
Hock Score	≥90%	75% to <90%	60% to <75%	<60%
Knee Score	≥90%	75% to <90%	60% to <75%	<60%
Neck Score	≥90%	75% to <90%	60% to <75%	<60%
Mobility Score	≥90%	75% to <90%	60% to <75%	<60%

*Percentage of cattle in the sample scoring Acceptable

**Next cattle assessment is due in 12 months with a larger sample size

Note: a corrective action plan must be developed with a dairy professional who is required to sign the plan.

What do I need to show the validator?

At the time of validation, you must provide:

- the cattle assessment report (including the peer report) conducted by a qualified assessor; and,
- a documented corrective action plan signed by a dairy professional to improve measures that fall within the Red zone or Dark Red zone, if any.

If this documentation is not available at time of validation, the validator will issue a major non-conformance, which, if not closed, will prevent you from achieving or maintaining proAction registration. This may carry penalties according to provincial policies.

What do I have to do by the next cattle assessment or validation? When do I have to show improvement?

If your herd scores in the Red zone or Dark Red zone for any measure, you must strive to improve those scores by the next cattle assessment.

If one or more results fall in the Dark Red zone, your next cattle assessment will be due in 12 months from your validation anniversary date, instead of 24 months, and the sample size will increase. The increased frequency will ensure timely follow-up, and the increased sample size will improve the accuracy of the cattle assessment results, which will help you evaluate how effective your corrective actions have been in resolving the root cause of the problem(s).

Farms will remain on the 12-month frequency until they demonstrate improvement out of the Dark Red zone. After three consecutive Dark Red zone results for the same measure, farms must demonstrate improvement out of the zone to continue to meet proAction requirements.

Once a herd has improved to the Green, Yellow or Red zones, the next cattle assessment will be due in 24 months from the validation anniversary date with the standard sample size.

How can I improve my scores? Who can help me?

Farmers must work with their herd veterinarians, hoof trimmers, dairy nutrition advisors or dairy specialists, to develop their specialized corrective action plans and then farmers must implement those plans to improve their scores. A sample corrective action template (Record 7b) is provided in the proAction Workbook.

DFC has published fact sheets, based on research related to body condition score, injuries and lameness, which outline common causes of each issue and suggestions on how to improve, and ultimately to achieve better scores by subsequent cattle assessments. Farmers should also consider regularly scoring cattle for the animal-based measures outlined in the proAction Reference Manual. For these tools, visit DFC's

website:

www.dairyfarmers.ca/proAction/resources/animal-care.

I did not have a cattle assessment done before my validation. How do I get one done now?

You should contact your provincial association as soon as possible to discuss options to have a cattle assessment done.

Note: cattle assessments completed after a validation has occurred, but which are required to demonstrate conformance for that past validation, will expire 24 months (or 12 months if on the 12-month frequency) from the date of the validation, not from the date of the assessment.