

CHAPTER 1 SELECTION AND CARE

1.3 CARE OF DRAUGHT CATTLE

1.3.1 HUSBANDRY OF WORKING CATTLE

INTRODUCTION

Working animals are a valuable asset and they need careful attention. The prevention of injuries and disease is better than cure. Proper management, with daily inspection, good handling and careful husbandry of the animals will reduce health problems. Simple attention to animal condition, feeding and providing adequate water will go a long way in maintaining animals in a healthy state so they can work well.

DAILY CARE

Work animals like routine. It is good to keep to a regular schedule for grooming, health checks, watering, feeding and grazing. Animals should be fed and watered daily, with grazing allowed whenever possible.

At the beginning of the working day, call the oxen if they are outside, or go up to them if they are in their stable. Greet them by name, and do not be afraid to talk to them - throughout the world farmers talk to their working animals and develop close relationships with them. If animals are being fed supplements, now is a good time to give them some. Even if there is no supplement, try to bring some form of treat - a small amount of salt on the palm of the hand is popular, but it could be some grass, grain or fruit. This will encourage the oxen to enjoy human company.

Daily grooming of animals will not only keep them clean, it also promotes a good working relationship between the handler and the animals. It allows the handler to observe any problems, such signs of sickness, or any injuries, sores, wounds, eye irritation or damaged horns. The animals can be lightly brushed in the direction of the hair (ie, head to tail) with a suitable hand brush (a scrubbing brush with plastic or fibre bristles is satisfactory). This removes dirt and promotes close contact with the animals. Some farmers do not bother with grooming, thinking perhaps that it is not essential for work, but the few minutes it takes are likely to be repaid in the subsequent responsiveness of the animals.

Hooves should be regularly cleaned and checked for cracking or rot. Foot problems can lead to lameness and cause the animal to be unable to work. Foot problems are not common if stables

and sheds have clean dry surfaces. Paddocks or standing areas outside the shed should be well drained. If animals have to stand in mud, they will be more susceptible to foot problems.

Animals should be checked for ticks each morning. Normally these should be removed (see below on page 4). Any sores or wounds should be cleaned with a solution of salt and water or with a wound cream or antiseptic, if available. Wounds should be kept free of flies and cleaned daily until they become sealed and dry.

HEALTH CHECK

As the animals are greeted, inspected and groomed, the following ten points should be checked, just to make sure each animal is normal and healthy.

- Breathing normally and chewing the cud
- On raising itself, stretches legs and passes dung
- Dung piles up (is not liquid) and urine is normal
- Walks normally
- Coat smooth and shiny
- Ears alert, moving to and fro
- Eyes bright and clear
- Muzzle cool and moist, not watery
- No fresh wounds or swellings; no ticks
- Good appetite, no rapid loss of condition

ANIMAL CONDITION

The condition of all work animals should be regularly assessed (**Fig. 1**). If an animal is in poor condition, it may be necessary to feed it some supplement (**Module 1.3.2**). Animals in poor condition can only work for a limited time, but continued loss of condition can be serious and even life-threatening.

WORK COWS

If one or more of the working animals are cows (females) they should receive a little extra attention, particularly if they are expected to combine reproduction with work. Work cows can provide milk, calves and work **provided they are well fed**. The daily requirements of working oxen and working cows may be similar as far as work goes, but the working cow needs extra

feed for milk production and during pregnancy. In order that the cow can work and reproduce, it requires more, and better quality, feed supplements than those given to oxen.

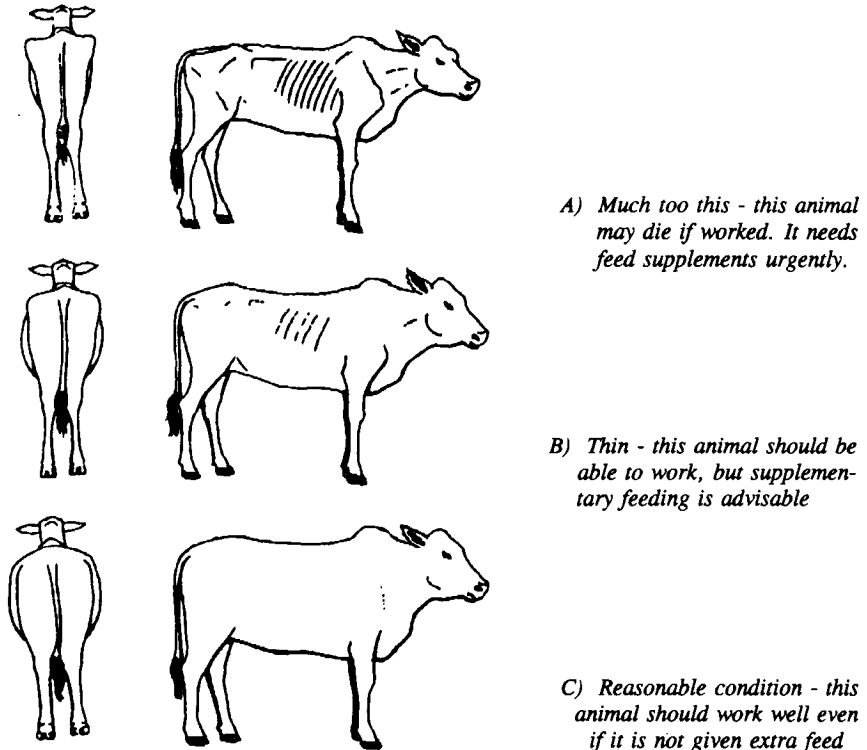


Fig. 1 Body condition of cattle

GETTING READY FOR WORK

Check that the yoke is in good condition, and that there are no splinters or frayed guides. Make sure the yoke is comfortably fitted, and that it does not rub excessively and cause blisters or sores.

WORKING SCHEDULE

Work should be carried out in the cooler hours of the day if possible, that is the early morning and/or late afternoon. Cattle seldom work well between the hours of 10 am and 3 pm when the sun is strongest. In some countries animals even start working by moonlight, so they can finish before the sun is too hot. Cattle should not be worked for more than 6 hours a day and 4 hours

is normal. While working, animals should be rested if they show signs of distress (excessive salivation, panting, staring eyes). In any case, animals (and handlers) should be allowed a regular five minute break every 30 minutes.

GRAZING

Animals need at least six hours a day for grazing, if they are to obtain enough food. Even six hours may not be enough if the pasture is poor or scarce, and the work hard. Try not to keep the animals in their night pen longer than necessary, although cattle do need several hours a day for ruminating.

TICK CONTROL

The importance of tick control varies between different countries and regions. It may also depend on the season of the year. In areas where East Coast Fever and/or Corridor Disease are common, effective tick control is vital - it may literally be a matter of life or death. In other areas, a small tick challenge may be acceptable, and may even help maintain the animals' resistance. In each locality, the importance of controlling ticks and other external parasites should be discussed with farmers and the veterinary services. The veterinary services should be able to advise on suitable tick control procedures, and the appropriate chemicals to use. Cattle owners often know simple, effective husbandry practices that can be followed by farmers that are starting to use work animals. These may include areas to avoid and traditional tick control remedies based on oils and/or local plants.

In most countries, weekly dipping, spraying or washing with an appropriate chemical should be carried out during times of major challenge (throughout the year in some areas). If there is a danger of East Coast Fever and/or Corridor Disease, dipping or spraying every 4 to 5 days may be needed at critical times. Special attention should be given to those parts of the body prone to tick attack, such as the ears, tail and the inside of the legs.

HEALTH CARE

In most cases the health care procedures for working animals will be similar to those of other cattle. The advice of local veterinary services and cattle keepers should be sought and recommendations followed. Vaccinations available may well include those against blackquarter and anthrax. If trypanosomiasis is a problem, regular prophylaxis treatment with a drug such as *Samorin* may be advised. At the time of the rains, drenching for internal parasites may be recommended, but adult animals such as work oxen are often quite tolerant of worm challenge.