

Beef Carcase Classification Scheme

Guidance on dressing specifications and carcase classification



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Introduction

Under the Beef Carcase Classification Scheme, abattoirs which slaughter in excess of 75 adult bovine animals per week on rolling a yearly average basis, are required to register and classify carcases.

The purpose of the scheme is to make sure that adult bovine animals are uniformly classified and producers are guaranteed fair payment for cattle delivered to slaughterhouses, based on the Community Grading Scale. This classification also improves the transparency of the market in carcases to the benefit of all sectors of the industry.

Adult bovine animals must be classified in accordance with the 'Community scale' to comply with regulations governing the Beef Carcase Classification Scheme. Carcases must be labelled with the classification details and full records kept. People who carry out classification duties need to be licenced.

Inspections

Beef carcase classification is carried out by abattoir operatives or under contract by MLC Services Ltd. The levels of classification are regularly checked at unannounced inspection visits carried out by Rural Payments Agency Livestock and Meat Inspectorate (RPA L&M). The accuracy of classification is important to maintain consistency throughout the industry.

As part of the inspection, RPA L&M Inspectors check the standards of all licenced classifiers and make sure that carcases are dressed in line with approved dressing specifications. Carcases are checked and weighed to ensure that weights are accurately recorded on all documentation. Inspectors also check that documents are accurate and that all information required under the regulations is fully recorded.

When an Inspector finds that the requirements are not being fully met, action is taken and, where necessary, additional inspection visits are made to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Beef Carcase Classification Scheme.

Community scale for the classification of adult bovine carcasses

Carcases of adult bovine animals will be classified by assessment of conformation (five classes: E, U, R, O and P) and fat cover (five classes: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5).

Cattle conformation is a visual assessment of the overall shape and flesh coverage of the carcase. To be given an E classification, the carcase must have excellent conformation and must have no defects of its essential parts.

In cases of U, O and P conformation, a carcase with three essential parts that are not of an homogeneous nature will be placed in the class that applies to two of the three parts. These categories are further divided into upper (+) and lower (-) bands.

The fat class is determined by a visual appraisal of external fat development. Fat assessment is in five classes ranging from 1 (very lean) to 5 (very fat) with classes 4 and 5 being subdivided into leaner (L) and fatter (H) bands.

Conformation



E-Excellent



U-Very good

Fat cover



1-Low



2-Slight

The EC classification

When describing a carcase in classification terms, the conformation class must always be given before the fat class. For example, where a carcase is of conformation class R and a fat class of 4L it would be recorded as R4L.

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Conformation



R-Good



O-Fair



P-Poor

Fat cover



3-Average



4-High



5-Very high

Beef Carcase Classification Approved Dressing Specifications

1. Standard Specification
2. EC Reference Specification
3. UK Specification

The table below illustrates areas of the carcase that are subject to trim depending on the dressing specification used. For further guidance please refer to pages 7 to 17.

	Cod/Udder Fat	Crown Fat	Bed Fat	Brisket Fat	Thin Skirt
Standard Specification	ON	ON	ON	ON	ON
EC Reference Specification	OFF	OFF	ON	ON	OFF
UK Specification	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF

Dressing Specification - Trimming Requirements

Standard Specification
Ex Kidney Knob and Channel Fat (KKCF)

- Neck Trim - see Figure 1 (page 10)



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EC Reference Specification (Reduced from Standard Specification)



- Neck Trim - see Figure 1 (page 10)
- Cod/Mammary (Udder) Fat Removal - see Figure 3 (page 12)
- Topside (Crown) Fat Trim - see Figure 4 (page 13)

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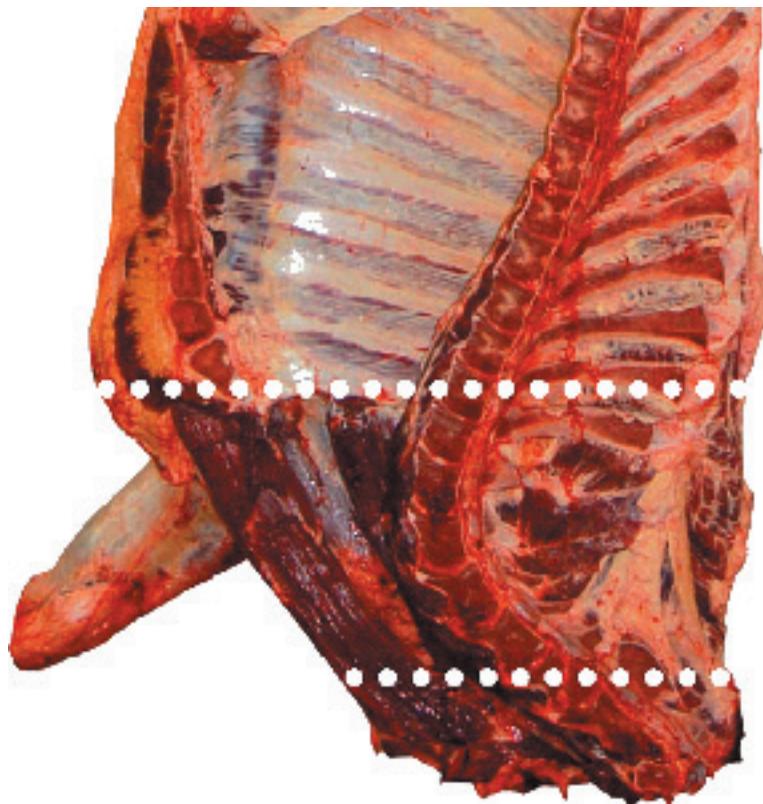
UK Specification (Reduced from EC Specification)

- Neck Trim - see Figure 1 (page 10)
- Thin Skirt Removal - see Figure 2 (page 11)
- Cod/Mammary (Udder) Fat Removal - see Figure 3 (page 12)
- Topside (Crown) Fat Trim - see Figure 4 (page 13)
- Flank (Bed) Fat Trim - see Figure 5 (page 14)
- Brisket Fat Trim - see Figure 6 (page 15)



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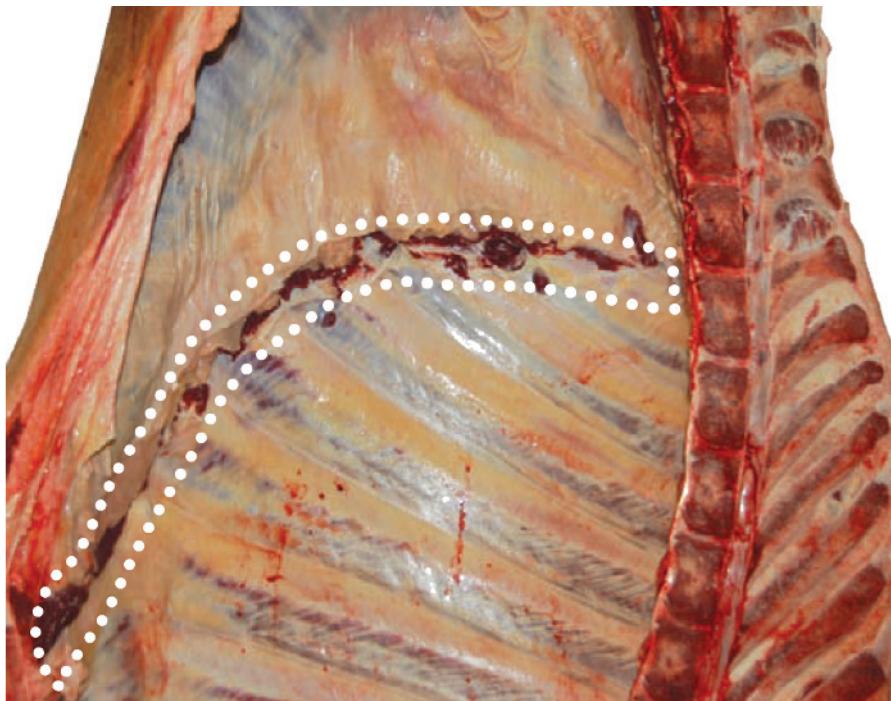
Figure 1 - Neck Trim



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- The 'sticking' must be done in such a way that the neck muscles are not damaged.
- The jugular vein and its adjacent fat must be removed.
- Fat removal must not extend horizontally below the joint of the third and fourth cervical vertebrae, or above or behind the first rib.
- There must be no removal or trimming of the neck muscle.

Figure 2 - Thin Skirt Removal



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- The fleshy part of the thin skirt is removed back to the ribs at the division between the thorax and abdomen.
- Trimming must be confined to the area identified on the illustration – no further trim of the abdominal membrane is permitted.
- Any fat on the inside of the pleura, between the ribs, must be left attached.

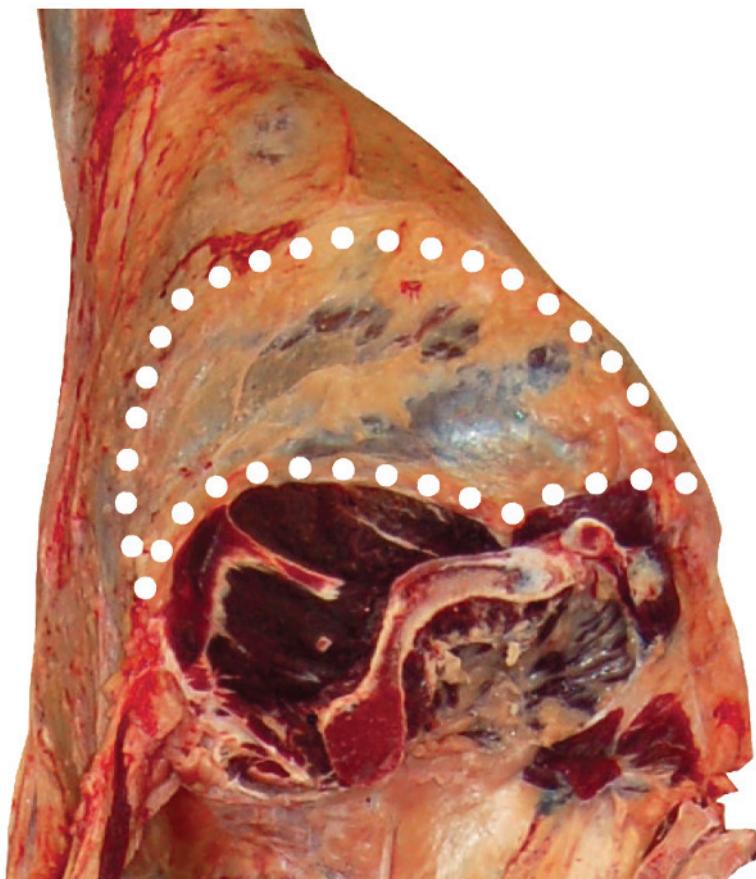
Figure 3 - Cod/Mammary (Udder) Fat Removal



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- The cod or udder fat is removed in it's entirety.
- Trimming must not expose the muscle at any point and must be confined to the area identified on the illustration above.

Figure 4 - Topside (Crown) Fat Trim



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- The heavier fat deposit on the inside of the topside is removed.
- Trimming must not expose the muscle and must be confined to the area identified on the illustration above.

Figure 5 - Flank (Bed) Fat Trim



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- The fat deposit within the flank area is removed.
- Trimming must not expose the muscle and must be confined to the area identified on the illustration above.
- There must be no 'dropping' of the flank edge muscle.
- There must be no perforation, damage or cutting through of the outer carcase/muscle.

Figure 6 - Brisket Fat Trim



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- The brisket must be trimmed to leave a covering of fat and the muscle tissue must not be exposed.
- Trimming must be confined to the area identified on the illustration above.

Additional information

Carcase dressing

The following parts should be removed from all carcases before weighing:

The head, including the tongue

- The head should be removed by a cut at right angles to the line of the back between the skull and the spinal column, thus leaving the entire spinal column on the carcase.

The feet

- The hind feet should be removed at the hock joint between the tarsal and metatarsal (hind cannon) bones, or not more than 25mm (1 inch) from the joint towards the hoof.
- The forefeet should be removed at the knee joint between the carpal and metacarpal (fore cannon) bones.

Hide

- The hide should be removed as carefully as possible and in such a way as to leave the subcutaneous fat intact.

The tail

- The tail should be removed at the junction between the 5th sacral vertebra and the first tail (coccygeal) vertebra. Where it is trade practice to leave the tail on the carcase, the carcase weight should be reduced by 1kg. (There are five sacral vertebrae which are fused in cattle and the first tail vertebra articulates with the last sacral vertebra.)

Alimentary canal

- The stomachs and the enclosing caul fat, guts and gut fat should be removed.

Genito-urinary organs

- The genito-urinary organs, excluding the kidneys, should be removed.
- In cows the mammary tissue should also be removed.

The spleen, liver and pancreas

- The spleen, liver and pancreas should be removed.

Pillar of diaphragm

- The pillar of diaphragm (ie thick skirt) should be removed. Where it is trade practice to leave the pillar of the diaphragm on the carcase, the carcase weight should be reduced by 1kg.

Diaphragm

- The diaphragm (ie thin or rib skirt) should be trimmed to leave a margin of 12mm (0.5 inch) of membrane attached to the diaphragm.

The lungs, trachea, oesophagus, larynx (ie lights) and heart

- The lungs, trachea, oesophagus, larynx (ie lights) and heart should be removed. The thoracic fat, which is loosely attached along the length of the breast bone, should also be removed.

Thymus glands

- Thymus glands ie heart bread and neck bread, should be removed.

Major blood vessels and clotted blood

- Major blood vessels and clotted blood in the neck should be removed. Care should be taken to make sure that there is no undue trimming or cutting of the neck muscles.

The spinal cord

- The spinal cord should be removed.

Carcase trimming guidelines on the implementation of EC Regulation 563/82 (as amended)

Topside (Crown) Fat Trim

- The heavier fat deposit on the inside of the topside is removed.
- Trimming must not expose the muscle and must be confined to the area identified on the illustration at figure 4, page 13.

Cod/Mammary (Udder) Fat Removal

- The cod or udder fat is removed in its entirety.
- Trimming must not expose the muscle at any point and must be confined to the area identified on the illustration at figure 3, page 12.

Flank (Bed) Fat Trim

- The fat deposit within the flank fat area is removed.
- Trimming must not expose the muscle and must be confined to the area identified on the illustration at figure 5, page 14.
- There must be no 'dropping' of the flank muscle.
- There must be no perforation, damage or cutting through of the outer carcase/muscle.

Thin Skirt Removal

- The fleshy part of the thin skirt is removed back to the ribs at the division between the thorax and abdomen.
- Trimming must be confined to the area identified on the illustration at figure 2, page 11 – no further trim of the abdominal membrane is permitted.
- Any fat on the inside of the pleura, between the ribs, must be left attached.

Brisket Fat Trim

- The brisket must be trimmed to leave a covering of fat and the muscle tissue must not be exposed.
- Trimming must be confined to the area identified on the illustration at figure 6, page 15.

Trimming guidance applicable to all dressing specifications

Neck Trim

- The 'sticking' must be done so that the neck muscles are not damaged.
- The jugular vein and adjacent fat must be removed.
- Fat removal must not extend horizontally below the joint of the third and fourth cervical vertebrae, or above or behind the first rib.
- There must be no removal or trimming of the neck muscle.

Hide Removal/Subcutaneous Fat

- The hide should be removed as carefully as possible and in such a way as to leave the subcutaneous fat intact.

Flank Edge

- There must be no trimming of the flank edge.
- The soft cartilage at the end of the sternum may be removed in line with the flank edge.

Channel Fat Trim

- All channel fat to be removed.
- There must be no removal or trimming of any associated muscle in the channel.
- On male carcases, the retractor muscle must be retained and must not be heavily trimmed.

Kidney Knob Fat Removal

- The kidney and kidney knob must be removed for the UK specification in price reporting abattoirs, but removal is optional in all other abattoirs.
- There must be no trimming of the abdominal membrane beyond the point where the kidney knob is naturally attached.

Carcase weights – rounding

Carcase weights must be recorded as per the actual scale display and not be rounded up or down. If weighing issues are identified at an inspection visit, the appropriate authority will be informed.

Carcase identification and labelling under the Beef Carcase Classification Scheme

The Beef Carcase Classification Scheme requires carcases to be either stamped with, or have labels attached, showing mandatory information.

Where carcases are stamped, the following information must be shown:

- the category of the animal; and
- the class of conformation and fat cover.

Where labels are used, the following must be shown in addition to the details above;

- the approval number of the slaughterhouse;
- the identification or slaughter number of the animal;
- the date of slaughter;
- the weight of the carcase; and
- where applicable, that the classification has been carried out by using automated grading techniques.

Labels must be tamper-proof, tear-resistant and firmly attached to each quarter of the carcase.

Additional beef labelling

Please be aware that in addition to the requirements of the Beef Carcase Classification Scheme, there are also labelling requirements under the Beef Labelling Scheme.

All beef offered for sale in the EC falls under the Beef Labelling Scheme and must be labelled with certain compulsory information. Guidance on the requirements of the scheme can be found in the Beef Labelling Guide. You can get a copy of this guidance from RPA.

An Approved (Voluntary) Labelling Scheme operates to allow additional information regarding origin, production methods or characteristics, which are not required under the compulsory side of Beef Labelling. Further information on the Approved Labelling Scheme can be obtained from RPA.

Contacts

Beef Carcase Classification Scheme

For general information regarding the Beef Carcase Classification Scheme in England and Wales contact;

Beef Carcase Classification Section
Meat Technical Schemes
Rural Payments Agency
Eden Bridge House
Lowther Street
Carlisle
CA3 8DX

Tel: 0122 864 0369
E-mail: MTS.carlisle@rpa.gsi.gov.uk

Further information on Beef Carcase Classification and Beef Labelling can be accessed via RPA website under RPA Schemes, Livestock Schemes at www.rpa.gov.uk

If your business is located in Scotland or Northern Ireland you should contact the appropriate department.

Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD)
Tel: 0131 244 6425/6408

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) – Northern Ireland
Tel: 0289 052 4990

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For general information regarding the Beef Labelling Scheme in England and Wales contact

Beef Labelling Section
Meat Technical Schemes
Rural Payments Agency
Eden Bridge House
Lowther Street
Carlisle
CA3 8DX

E-mail: MTS.carlisle@rpa.gsi.gov.uk
Tel: 0122 864 0469

Approved (voluntary) labelling

For general information of Approved (voluntary) labelling in England, contact:

Beef Labelling Section at RPA

Tel: 0122 864 0369

If your business is located in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland you should apply to the appropriate department.

Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD)

Tel: 0131 244 6425/6408

Welsh Assembly Government – Department for Environmental, Planning and Countryside

Tel: 0292 082 5401

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) – Northern Ireland

Tel: 0289 052 4990



Rural Payments Agency
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