

TECHNICAL BULLETIN

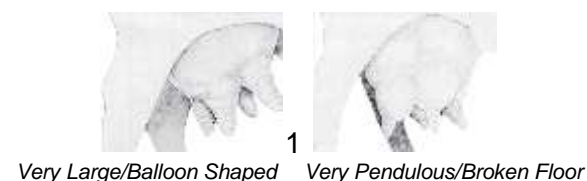
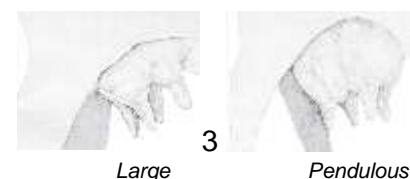
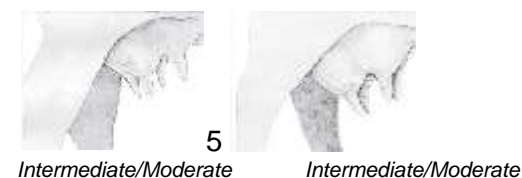
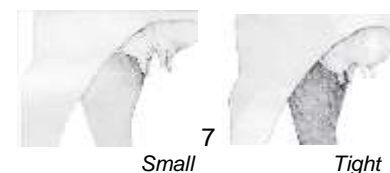
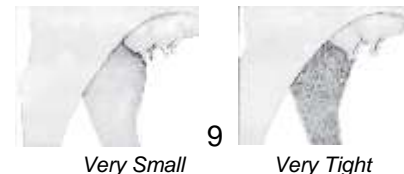
Understanding the Gelbvieh Udder Scoring System

As the beef industry strives to become more competitive, producers are analyzing any and all inputs in an attempt to keep expenses under control. One aspect of this has been a more critical evaluation of the functional soundness of the cowherd. This can be likened to a “cowherd production quality audit”. Why? Because a cow that isn’t problem-free costs extra time and labor. Many refer to functional characteristics as convenience traits. Others call them necessities. It’s a fact that most profitable operators are running their cows with less labor than ever before, making it even more essential that cows get it done without extra care. Udder and teat quality are two of the most important functional traits. Udder and teat soundness are a concern for a number of reasons:

1. Labor associated with extra costs and reduced convenience;
2. Longevity, which may be reduced because of injury or mastitis;
3. Calf performance, affected by a reduction in milk flow, or lower colostrum intake by newborn calves having difficulty nursing oversized teats; and
4. Udder and teat characteristics appear to be heritable. This means that there is definitely is variation in the udder quality of daughters from different sire groups. Thus, change can be made through selection.

The initial Canadian/American Gelbvieh Association (CGA/AGA) scoring system was implemented in the early 1990s and was based on the linear-type scoring system developed by the American Holstein Association. In the fall of 2007, the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Board of Directors approved a set of guidelines for beef cattle udder scoring that is based on a simplified version of the Holstein system. Going forward the CGA/AGA will utilize the new BIF scoring system. Scores, for the system range, from 1 to 9 for each of two categories, teat size and udder suspension. Descriptions, scores and photos are included as a guide in this Technical Bulletin.

Teat Size/Udder Suspension Scores



Teat Size scores (1-9) and Udder Suspension scores (1-9) can be reported on the Registration Application along with birth and calving ease data.

Teat Size

Scores range from 9 (Very Small) to 1 (Very Large, balloon shaped) and are subjective assessments of teat length and circumference. In general smaller teat sizes are more desirable. Oversized teats are difficult for newborn calves to nurse and the calf may not receive adequate colostrum, which could lead to a higher incidence of scours or decreased immunity levels in the newborn calf. In Canadian studies, cows with more desirable teat scores had calves that nursed sooner after birth.

Udder Suspension

Scores range from 9 (Very Tight) to 1 (Very Pendulous) and represent assessments of udder support. Weak udder suspension results in pendulous udders that make it difficult for a calf to nurse. Weak suspension in the udder indicates a lack of support in the ligament that ties the udder to the cow’s body wall. Over time, weakness in this ligament will allow the udder to hang down too far from the body and may subject the udder to serious problems and increased potential for injury.

CGA/AGA's Udder Scoring System – Frequently Asked Questions

When is the best time to score cows?

The best time to score cows is within 24 hours after the calf is born. If the cow is going to have problems with udder quality, it typically will show up when she first freshens. In addition, this time is most convenient because udder scoring can be done along with tagging and weighing the calf. If you wait until the cow's udder is nursed out, teat size in particular cannot be accurately scored.

How do I record and report the information?

Designate two columns in your calving book for this information: one column for Teat Size (1-9) and one for Udder Suspension (1-9). This data then can be reported on the Registration Application along with birth and calving ease data.

Do I consider the age of the cow?

Udder quality will usually decline with age, however, age should not be considered when scoring udders. It is best to score the udders as they are, regardless of the age of the cow.

What good is a subjective score?

One concern is that since the basis of this scoring system is subjective in nature will the data be useable in comparing animals across herds at some point. Consistency within a herd as it is scored provides the basis for that herd. Contemporary groupings would be used in any sort of data analysis. BIF guidelines recommend a single person score all the cows. If this is not feasible or practical based on labor allocations, as few people as possible should score the animals and the scores should be as comparable as possible.

What is more important, teat circumference or teat length?

In general, teat circumference will cause problems much more often than teat length. Short teats are preferred, but long teats normally do not create difficulty for a calf provided the circumference is not excessively large. Scoring should consider circumference only.

How do you assign a score when teat size varies?

The BIF Guidelines recommend that the udder be scored on the weakest quarter. In this instance the largest teat is most likely to create a problem, assigning the teat size score based on the largest teat makes the most sense.

How does udder score relate to milk production?

Teats and udders should be scored without regard for the cow's milk production. The scoring system is intended solely for evaluating udder and teat soundness. Calf weaning weights are the best estimates of milk production.

Are certain scores more desirable than others?

In general, smaller teats and udders with tight suspension are more desirable. The advantage of starting to collect data is to identify what works and doesn't work in your environment and with your management practices. This starts the process of identifying sires that may have daughters that don't have significant changes in udder score until say the age of 8 versus others that have daughters with udders that start to change at the age of 4. Documenting problem udders at birth allows this data to be incorporated when it comes to cow culling time post weaning.

How will the CGA/AGA use this data?

Data that had been submitted prior to this change will be converted to the new scoring system. New data will be added with the long-term goal of incorporating this into our evaluation of genetics for longevity, cow productivity and profitability.