

The cost of NOT feeding sale cattle

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Drawing on data obtained from a recent demonstration conducted at Leopold Downs station and Roebuck Export Depot (looking at *weight change in feeder bulls between yarding and delivery to the exporter*) a desktop review was undertaken to investigate the economic impact of liveweight loss in the yards due to fasting (no food or no food and water).

The *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals (Cattle)* states that cattle should not be deprived of access to water for periods longer than 24 hours, unless in transit, in which case the codes of practice for transport of cattle apply. Lactating cattle, or those in poor condition, should not be deprived of access to water for periods in excess of 12 hours. In regards to food, cattle should not be deprived of access to food for periods longer than 48 hours, unless in transit; then the code of practice for transport will also apply. Stock in poor condition, pregnant, or calves less than one month of age should not be deprived of access to food for periods longer than 24 hours.

Based on the results of trial work conducted by Kirton et al. (1972), stock without access to food but with access to water lose 5% of their bodyweight after 24 hours, 8% after 48 hours and 9% after 72 hours. Based on the results of trial work conducted by Whytes et al. (1980), liveweight loss when access to both food and water is restricted increases considerably (8%, 11% and 14% respectively).

The table below compares the cost to producers of fasting animals over three days to that of feeding oaten hay over the same period. Stock with an average weight of 300 kg held off feed for 24 hours will suffer 15 kg liveweight loss; off feed and water will result in 24 kg liveweight loss over the same period. No weight loss is recorded when stock are offered oaten hay (at maintenance), however a cost is incurred to feed.

Ration and length	Weight change (%)	Weight change (kg)*	Cost to feed hay/head/day	Cost/head of weight loss at \$1.80/kg	Overall cost per head
Fast – food only (24 hr)	-5%	-15	na	\$27.00	\$27.00
Fast – food only (48 hr)	-8%	-24	na	\$43.20	\$43.20
Fast – food only (72 hr)	-9%	-27	na	\$48.60	\$48.60
Fast – food and water (24 hr)	-8%	-24	na	\$43.20	\$43.20
Fast – food or water (48 hr)	-11%	-33	na	\$59.40	\$59.40
Fast – food or water (72 hr)	-14%	-42	na	\$75.60	\$75.60
No fast – hay and water (24 hr)	^0	0	^^\$3.19	\$0.00	\$3.19
No fast – hay and water (48 hr)	^0	0	^^\$6.38	\$0.00	\$6.38
No fast – hay and water (72 hr)	^0	0	^^\$9.57	\$0.00	\$9.57

*Weight 300 kg. ^No weight gain expected. ^^Budgeted at 2% body mass (6 kg eaten per day) and oaten hay costing \$532 per tonne (delivered Leopold Downs, Fitzroy Crossing).

These figures clearly demonstrate that it makes economic sense to feed sale stock while waiting in the yards. It also fulfils the producer's legal and moral responsibility to care for the welfare of animals under their control.

References

Kirton, A, Paterson, D, & Duganzich, D 1972, 'Effect of pre-slaughter starvation in cattle, *Journal of Animal Science*, 34: 555–559.

Wythes, J, McLennan, S, Toleman, M 1980, 'Liveweight loss and recovery in steers fasted for periods of twelve to seventy two hours', *Aust J Exp Agric Anim Husb*, 20: 517–52.