Northern Ireland Assembly

Research and Information Service
Briefing Note

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Overview of the beef carcass classification systems used in Scotland and Northern Ireland

1   Background

This briefing note provides an overview of the beef carcass classification systems utilised within Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The carcass classification systems used in both jurisdictions have their origins in the requirements set out within EU legislation as follows:

- **Council Regulation 1234/07**[1] – Article 42 and Annex V establish the Community Scales for the classification of beef carcass of adult bovine animals;
- **Commission Regulation 1249/08**[2] - Article 3 and Annex I provide additional provisions on the classes of conformation and fat cover of carcases of adult bovine animals referred to Council Regulation 1234/07.

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[1] COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1234/2007 establishing a common organisation of agricultural markets and on specific provisions for certain agricultural products (Single CMO Regulation), 22nd October 2007
[2] COMMISSION REGULATION (EC) No 1249/2008 laying down detailed rules on the implementation of the Community scales for the classification of beef, pig and sheep carcasses and the reporting of prices thereof, 10th December 2008

In light of these regulations the following classification is utilised across the EU and could theoretically lead to up to 30 potential grades being applied to an adult bovine carcass. It is however worth pointing out that class S is only used in Belgium, and that within GB, conformation classes U, O and P are subdivided into U+, U- , O+, O-,P+ and P-. In addition within GB, fat classes 4 and 5 are divided into H and L.

Table 1: Generic EU classes of conformation and fat cover for carcasses of adult bovine animals

	Fat Class 1	Fat Class 2	Fat Class 3	Fat Class 4	Fat Class 5
S (superior)	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5
E (excellent)	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5
U (very good))	U1	U2	U3	U4	U5
R (good)	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
O (fair)	O1	O2	O3	O4	O5
P (poor)	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5

2   Scotland

In light of the earlier information within this briefing note table 2 below sets out the conformation classes utilised within Scotland.

Table 2: Classes of conformation and fat cover for carcasses of adult bovine animals used within Scotland[3]

	Fat Class 1	Fat Class 2	Fat Class 3	Fat Class 4 H	Fat Class 4 L	Fat Class 5 H	Fat Class 5 L
E	E1	E2	E3	E4H	E4L	E5H	E5L
U+	U1+	U2+	U3+	U4+H	U4+L	U5+H	U5+L
U-	U1-	U2-	U3-	U4-H	U4-L	U5-H	U5-L
R	R1	R2	R3	R4H	R4L	R5H	R5L
O+	O1+	O2+	O3+	O4+H	O4+L	O5+H	O5+L
O-	O1-	O2-	O3-	O4-H	O4-L	O5-H	O5-L
P+	P1+	P2+	P3+	P4+H	P4+L	P5+H	P5+L
P-	P1-	P2-	P3-	P4-H	P4-L	P5-H	P5-L

The use of this conformation data means that **there are 56 potential grades for an adult bovine carcass within Scotland**.

Beef carcass assessment is only currently done by Video Imaging Analysis (VIA) at one meat plant in Scotland (ABP Perth) – all other assessments conducted by inspectors.

3   Northern Ireland

The system utilised within Northern Ireland is set out in table 3 below.

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[3] Derived from Generic EU classes of conformation and fat cover for carcasses

Table 3: Current Pricing Grid for Prim Cattle in Northern Ireland[4]

	Fat	1			2			3			4			5		
Conformation		1-	1=	1+	2-	2=	2+	3-	3=	3+	4-	4=	4+	5-	5=	5+
E	+	-16	-14	-12	BASE	+2	+4	+6	+6	+6	+4	BASE	-4	-8	-12	-16
E	=	-16	-14	-12	BASE	+2	+4	+6	+6	+6	+4	BASE	-4	-8	-12	-16
E	-	-16	-14	-12	BASE	+2	+4	+6	+6	+6	+4	BASE	-4	-8	-12	-16
U	+	-18	-16	-14	-2	BASE	+2	+4	+4	+4	+2	-2	-6	-10	-14	-18
U	=	-20	-18	-16	-4	-2	BASE	+2	+2	+2	BASE	-4	-8	-12	-16	-20
U	-	-22	-20	-18	-6	-4	-2	BASE	BASE	BASE	-2	-6	-10	-14	-18	-22
R	+	-24	-22	-20	-8	-6	-4	-2	-2	-2	-4	-8	-12	-16	-20	-24
R	=	-26	-24	-22	-10	-8	-6	-4	-4	-4	-6	-10	-14	-18	-22	-26
R	-	-28	-26	-24	-12	-10	-8	-6	-6	-6	-8	-12	-16	-20	-24	-28
O	+	-34	-32	-30	-18	-16	-14	-12	-12	-12	-14	-18	-22	-26	-30	-34
O	=	-40	-38	-36	-24	-22	-20	-18	-18	-18	-20	-24	-28	-32	-36	-40
O	-	-46	-44	-42	-30	-28	-26	-24	-24	-24	-26	-30	-34	-38	-42	-46
P	+	-52	-50	-48	-36	-34	-32	-30	-30	-30	-32	-36	-40	-44	-48	-52
P	=	-58	-56	-54	-42	-40	-38	-36	-36	-36	-38	-42	-46	-50	-54	-58
P	-	-64	-62	-60	-48	-46	-44	-42	-42	-42	-44	-48	-52	-56	-60	-64

In spec grades inside gold box

The use of this conformation data means that **there are 225 potential grades for an adult bovine carcass within Northern Ireland**.

In spec grades for steers and heifers, within the gold box in table 3, can also attract an 8p per kg bonus provided they meet all of the following criteria:

- weight – 290-380 kg
- Age – under 30 months
- Animal part of the Farm Quality Assurance Scheme
- Country of origin - UK

Beef carcass assessment in Northern Ireland's meat plants is mainly done by Video Imaging Analysis (VIA) – exception is the 3 smaller plants at Ballymena, Oakdale and Lakeview where inspection is still performed by staff.

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[4] Cattle Pricing Factsheet, Livestock and Meat Commission website