

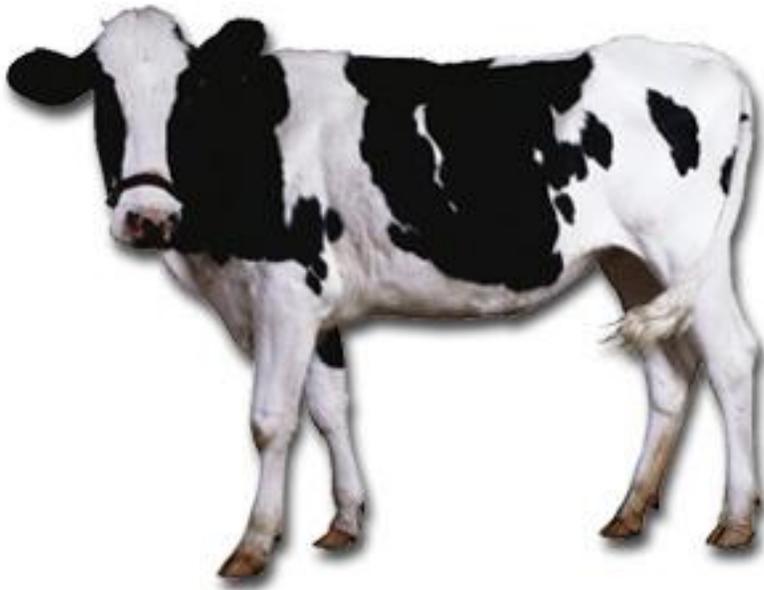


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COW/CATTLE FACT SHEET



Cattle, as individuals or as a herd, possess many unique traits, the most distinctive being their social disposition. They are extremely social animals and rely heavily on "safety in numbers" — herds can form with up to 300 animals. Each animal can recognize more than 100 individuals and will closely bond to some herd members, while carefully avoiding others. While the bond between mothers and daughters is particularly strong, calves also maintain lifelong relationships with their peers.

It is thought that cattle were first domesticated in 6,500 B.C. from wild cattle (aurochs) in Europe and the Near East. Only in the past two centuries have cattle been differentiated into breeds raised for beef or milk. Some cattle still exist as "dual purpose" breeds.

Some people incorrectly refer to all cattle as "cows." Cows are actually mature females who have, usually through reproduction, developed prominent hips and other adult physical characteristics. Heifers are immature females who have not yet calved or developed the mature characteristics of a cow.

Male cattle can be divided into three groups: bullocks, steers and bulls. A bullock is a young, uncastrated male who has begun to display secondary sexual characteristics. A steer is a castrated male bovine, whereas a bull is a mature, uncastrated male.

Cows are sturdy yet gentle animals. They are social animals and form strong bonds with their families and friends that can last their entire lives. The bond between a cow and her calf is especially powerful. If a mother cow is caught on the opposite side of a fence from her calf, she will become alarmed, agitated and call frantically. If they remain separated, she will stay by the fence through blizzards, hunger, and thirst, waiting to be reunited with her baby. This bond continues even after the calf is fully grown.

Cows "moo" to each other fairly frequently, allowing them to maintain contact even when they cannot see each other. But when they can see each other, they also communicate through a series of different body positions and some facial expressions. Cattle usually stand between 4 feet, 9 inches and 5 feet, 6 inches, and beef cattle range from 850 to 2,500 pounds depending on breed and gender. In non-commercial herds, cows have been observed nursing their male calves for up to three years.

Cattle have almost panoramic vision, which allows them to watch for predators or humans. They can see in color, except for red. They have an amazing sense of smell, and can detect scents more than six miles away.

Cattle are ruminant herbivores and will swallow vegetation whole, then later masticate their "cud" (chew their partially digested food).

The scientific name for the cattle group is "bos taurus," a subfamily of the bovidae family, which includes other hollow-horned animals. Interestingly, bulls are much less likely to use their horns than cows. However, the level of aggression can be influenced by the degree of confinement.

Cattle will learn from each other's mistakes: If an individual is shocked by an electric fence, others in the herd will become alarmed and avoid it. If a herd is confined by an electric fence, only 30% will ever be shocked. Cattle enjoy swimming and running in the moonlight, as they have been shown to remain active for a longer period between their two sleep sessions when the moon is full.

The lifespan of cattle averages 20 to 25 years. However, the lifespan of cattle raised for beef is significantly abbreviated. These animals are typically weaned at 6 to 10 months, live 3 to 5 months on range, spend 4 to 5 months being fattened in a feedlot, and are typically slaughtered at 15 to 20 months.

FACTORY FARMING

Life on "Old MacDonald's Farm" isn't what it used to be. The green pastures and idyllic barnyard scenes portrayed in children's books are quickly being replaced by windowless metal sheds, wire cages, "iron maidens," and other confinement systems integral to what is now known as "factory farming." Simply put, the factory farming system of modern agriculture strives to produce the most meat, milk, and eggs as quickly and cheaply as possible, and in the smallest amount of space possible. Cows, calves, pigs, chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, rabbits, and other animals are kept in small cages or stalls, often unable to turn around. They are deprived of exercise so that all of their bodies' energy goes toward producing flesh, eggs, or milk for human consumption. They are fed growth hormones to fatten them faster and are genetically altered to grow larger or to produce more milk or eggs than nature originally intended. Because crowding creates a prime atmosphere for disease, animals on factory farms are fed and sprayed with huge amounts of pesticides and antibiotics, which remain in their bodies and are passed on to the people who eat them, creating serious human health hazards.



Cattle raised for beef are usually born in one state, fattened in another, and slaughtered in yet another. They are fed an unnatural diet of high-bulk grains and other "fillers" (including sawdust) until they weigh 1,000 pounds. They are castrated, de-horned, and branded without anesthetics. During transportation, cattle are crowded into metal trucks where they suffer from fear, injury, temperature extremes, and lack of food, water, and veterinary care.

Calves raised for veal--the male offspring of dairy cows--are the most cruelly confined and deprived animals on factory farms. Taken from their mothers only a few days after birth, they are chained in stalls only 22 inches wide with slatted floors that cause severe leg and joint pain. Since their mothers' milk is usurped for human consumption, they are fed a milk substitute laced with hormones but deprived of iron: anemia keeps their flesh pale and tender but makes the calves very weak. When they are slaughtered at the age of about 16 weeks, they are often too sick or crippled to walk. One out of every 10 calves dies in confinement.

Factory farming is an extremely cruel method of raising animals, but its profitability makes it popular. One way to stop the abuses of factory farming is to support legislation that abolishes battery cages, veal crates, and intensive-confinement systems. Shop locally at small farms that use more humane methods. The best way to save animals from the misery of factory farming is to stop or reduce your consumption of meat, milk, and eggs.