



Rural Payments  
Agency

# Beef Carcase Classification Scheme

Guidance on dressing specifications and carcase classification



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# Introduction

If your abattoir slaughters 150 or more bovine animals per week on a rolling yearly average basis, you must register and classify carcasses under the Beef Carcase Classification (BCC) scheme.

If your slaughterhouse slaughters fewer than 150 bovine animals every week, in England and Wales, you are classed as a small scale operator. As a Small scale operator you can choose to register and classify bovine animals under the BCC scheme but if you do, you must classify all bovine animals and comply (meet) with all regulatory requirements governing the scheme.

The purpose of the scheme is to make sure that 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 carcasses to the benefit of all sectors of the industry.

Bovine animals must be classified in accordance with the 'Community scale' to comply with regulations governing the Beef Carcase Classification Scheme.

Carcasses must be labelled with the classification details and full records kept. People who carry out classification duties need to be licensed.

## Inspections

Classification of beef carcasses must be carried out by abattoir workers or under contract by another suitable qualified person/company. Livestock and Meat Inspectors from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) regularly check the levels of classification at unannounced inspection visits. The accuracy of classification is important to maintain consistency throughout the industry.

As part of the inspection, inspectors check the standards of all licensed classifiers and make sure that carcasses are dressed in line with approved dressing specifications. Carcasses are checked and weighed to make sure 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, they take action and, where necessary, additional inspection visits are made to make sure compliance with the requirements of the scheme.

# Community scale for the classification of bovine carcasses

Carcasses of bovine animals are 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 carcass. To be given an E classification, the carcass must have excellent conformation and must have no defects of its essential parts.

In cases of U, O and P conformation, a carcass 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 carcass in classification terms, the conformation class must always be given before the fat class.

For example, where a carcass is of conformation class R and a fat class of 4L it would be recorded as R4L.

## 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 explains areas of the carcase that are trimmed depending on the dressing specification used. You can find more information on pages 7 to 17.

Specification	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)



# 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)



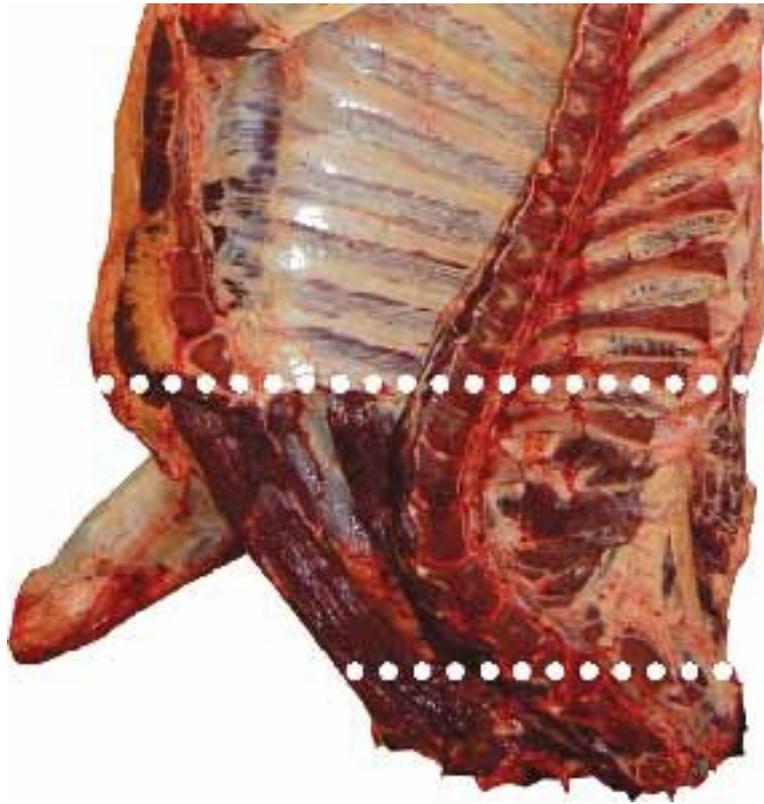
# UK Specification

(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)



## Figure 1 - Neck Trim



- 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



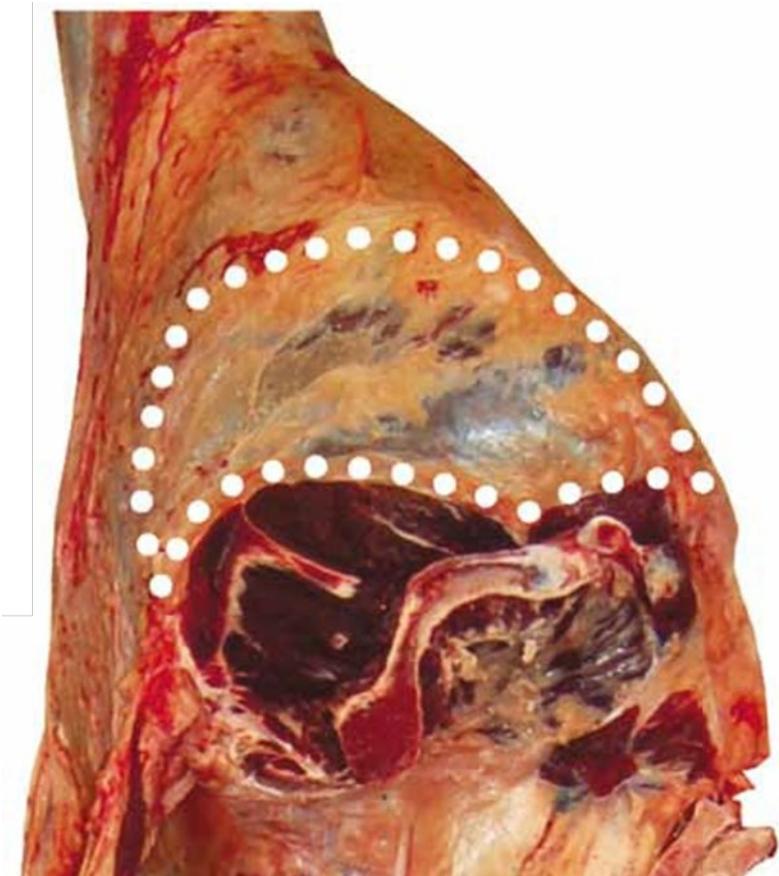
- The fleshy part of the thin skirt is removed back to the ribs at the division between the thorax and abdomen.
- Trimming must be confined to the area identified on the illustration - no further trim of the abdominal membrane is permitted.
- Any fat on the inside of the pleura, between the ribs, must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

## Figure 3 - Cod/Mammary (Udder) Fat Removal



- 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 above.

## Figure 4 - 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 above.

## Figure 5 - Flank (Bed) Fat Trim



- 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 carcass/muscle.

## Figure 6 - 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 above.

## Additional information

### Carcase dressing

- The following parts should be removed from all carcasses 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 carcass.

#### 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 carcass, the carcass 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 (that is, the thick skirt) should be removed. Where it is trade practice to leave the pillar of the diaphragm on the carcass, the carcass weight should be reduced by 1kg.

## Diaphragm

- The diaphragm (that is, the 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 (that is, lights) and heart

- The lungs, trachea, oesophagus, larynx (that is, 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, that is the 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 Regulation EUR 2017/1184

## 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 carcass/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 carcasses, 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

Record carcase weights according to the actual scale display. Do not round up or down. If weighing issues are found at an inspection visit, the inspector will inform the appropriate authority.

## Carcase identification and labelling under the Beef Carcase Classification Scheme

Carcases must 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
- 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
- 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 on GOV.UK.

# Contacts

## Beef Carcase Classification Scheme

For general information about 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

Telephone: 03300 416 508  
Email: [MTS.carlisle@rpa.gov.uk](mailto:MTS.carlisle@rpa.gov.uk)

For more information on beef carcase classification and beef labelling visit our website at [rpa.defra.gov.uk](http://rpa.defra.gov.uk), select the 'Full list of RPA schemes' tab, Livestock schemes, then choose the relevant scheme.

## Beef Labelling Scheme

For general information about the Beef Labelling scheme in England and Wales contact:

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CA3 8DX

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