In order to follow and understand the market, it is necessary that one is familiar with the market reporting system, in particular the terms used to describe livestock. This brochure serves to illustrate the livestock descriptions and language used by NLRS to report prime cattle markets.

NLRS uses a standardised language across all states that relies on a combination of sex, age, weight, fatness, the degree of muscularity and in some instances, the market destination of the animal. The following chart details the categories and descriptions used.

Age/Sex Category	Description	Carcase Weight	Live Weight
Calves	Male and female calves less than six months old.	0-40 40.1+	0-80 80.1+
Vealer Steers and Vealer Heifers	Castrate male or female cattle with no permanent teeth. Less than twelve months old and still suckling.	0-110 110.1-150 150.1-180 180.1+	0-200 200.1-280 280.1-330 330.1+
Yearling Steers and Yearling Heifers	Castrate male or female cattle. Predominately with no permanent teeth however, two are permissible.	0-180 180.1-220 220.1+	0-330 330.1-400 400.1+
Steers	Export type castrate male cattle with up to six permanent teeth.	-220 220.1-280 280.1-340 340.1-420	-400 400.1-500 500.1-600 600.1-750
Heifers	Export type female cattle with up to six permanent teeth.	0-280 280.1+	0-540 540.1+
Manufacturing Steers	Castrate male cattle of any age including dairy crossbred and aged types.	0-280 280.1+	0-540 540.1+
Cows	Female cattle with eight permanent teeth.	0-180 180.1-260 260.1+	0-400 400.1-520 520.1+
Bulls	Male and castrate male cattle of any age showing bullish traits.	0-260 260.1-340 340.1+	0-450 450.1-600 600.1+
Feeder Steers	Castrate male cattle purchased to be grain fed by commercial feed-lots.		200-320 320.1-400 400.1-500
Feeder Heifers	Female cattle purchased to be grain fed by commercial feedlots.		200-320 320.1-370

In addition to the more common, descriptive terms, NLRS also makes reference to the fat coverage and muscularity of an animal.

The muscle or red meat content of a beef animal is the most valuable part of its carcase. To help identify the red meat content of different cattle (in combination with estimating fatness), a method of evaluating shape has been developed and is termed "muscle score". Muscle score describes the shape of cattle, independent of the influence of fatness. Research, both within Australia and overseas, has shown that when shape is assessed in this way, it is an aid in predicting an animal's worth.

A pre-requisite of accurate muscle evaluation is the accurate appraisal of fatness. Once an animal's fatness is known, adjustments (visually/mentally) can be made to ensure that fatness does not play a role in the evaluation of the animal's shape.

Through closely examining those areas of the body where fat is most visible, or by actually feeling those areas of the animal's body, it is possible, with training and practice, to become extremely accurate in subjectively determining the level of subcutaneous fat.

Muscling can be confused with fat if assessors are not trained in distinguishing between the two. Muscle bulges and is firm, whereas fat wobbles and shrouds or flattens the animals' shape. Muscle is round and curved and animals with a high degree of muscling, when viewed from behind, are thicker through the stifle area than they are over the top. A fat, less muscular animal is widest over the top and tends to appear flat down the stifle muscle when viewed from behind.

Indicators of muscling, in order of importance are:
• thickness and roundness of the hindquarter;
• stifle thickness and width in the twist; and
• width across the back and loin.

There are five muscle scores ranging from A (extremely well muscled) through to E (lightly muscled) and six fat scores ranging from 1 (lean) to 6 (fat).

NLRS uses a combination of muscle and fat scores (known as grade scores) to help describe cattle.

Grade Score Price Matrix

Yearling Steer 330-400kg

Muscle

Fat		B	C	D
	2	152	130	108
	3	174	147	122
	4	-	145	135

Prices as at time of print and calculated on a national basis.

This matrix shows the price variations received for cattle of differing grade scores. It is designed to emphasise the importance of striving for maximum muscling and optimum fat depth in cattle.

While this matrix shows price variations for yearling steers, similar price variations can be identified across most grades.

The average beast falls into the C & D muscle categories. Thus, it is easy to identify the benefit of increasing an animals muscle score by just one grade.

This is illustrated further by the diagrams on page 4, which shows the variation from liveweight through to carcase weight and then on to saleable meat yield.

We often ignore saleable meat yield, as it is far removed from the prices received at the point of sale. However, the fact is that a livestock buyer operating on prime stock makes their decision on the potential yield of the animal, thereby following the beast as per the steps demonstrated in the diagram on page 4.

Another handy skill to master is the estimation of dressing percentage. Dressing percentage is a factor used to calculate carcase weight from a known or estimated liveweight. It is also used to help compare liveweight prices with carcase weight prices. The ability to determine dressing percentage allows an individual to estimate the carcase weight of a live animal, or to compare the price that would be received on a liveweight basis with the price received on a carcase value basis or vice versa.

The term 'yield' is often used instead of dressing percentage. Dressing percentage is used to calculate the difference between live and carcase weight while yield is the difference between carcase weight and saleable meat content.
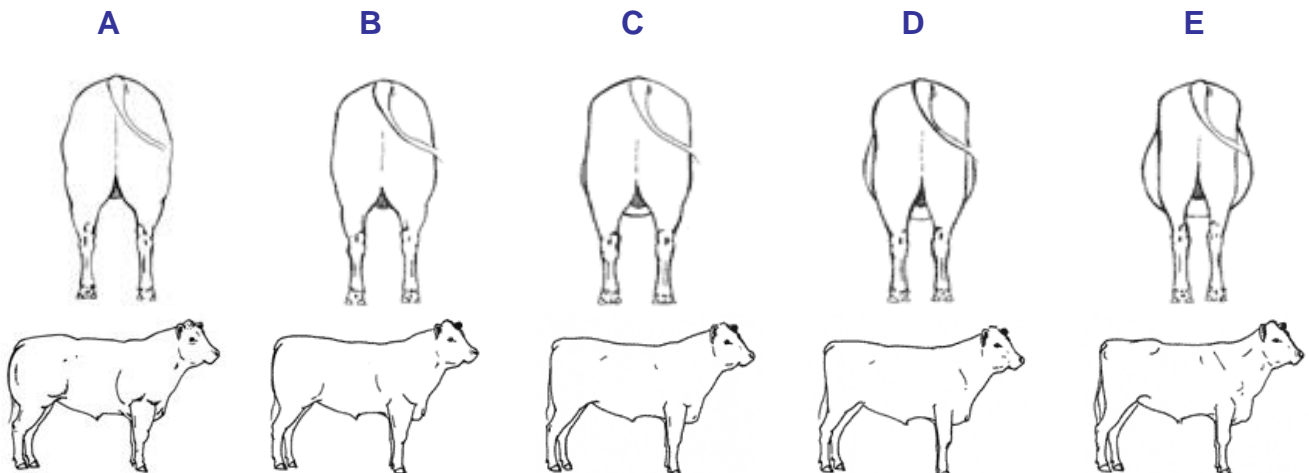
Cattle Fat Scores

Grade	P8 Site (mm)	12th Rib (mm)
1	0-2	0-1
2	3-6	2-3
3	7-12	4-7
4	13-22	8-12
5	23-32	13-18
6	32+	18+

Cattle Muscle Scores

A B C D E

Diagrams supplied by NSW Agriculture