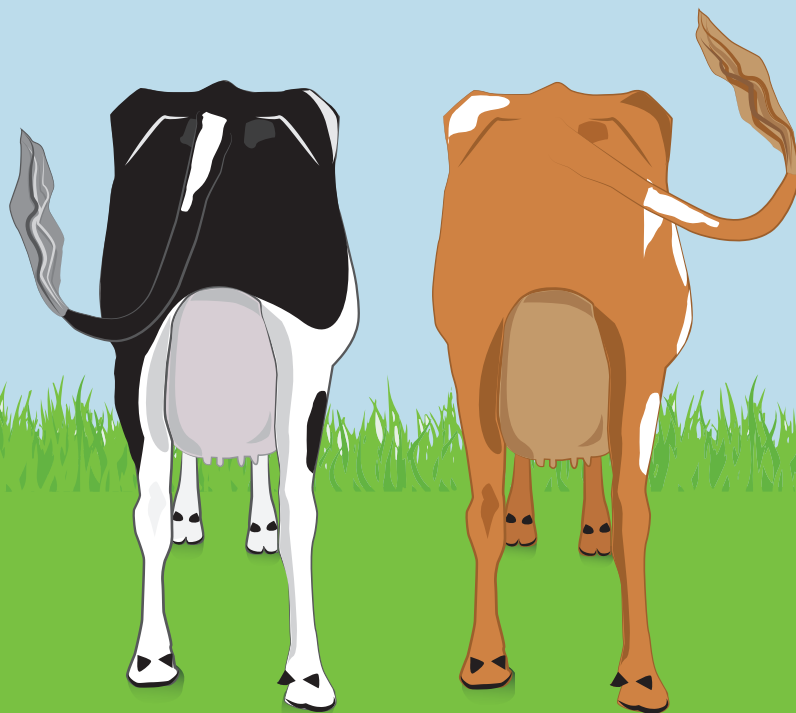


EVERY COW HAS

A TAIL TO TELL

On-farm guidelines for preventing damaged tails



EVERY COW HAS A TAIL TO TELL

PREVENTING DAMAGED TAILS



No farmer wants their animals being harmed, and this includes tail injuries. Tail damage is painful for cows and should be avoided at all costs. The tail tells a story. What are the ones on your farm saying?

Minimising tail damage on farm means improved animal care, less stress for cows and staff, and a more enjoyable workplace. Cows remember things just like we do - just like one friendly pat at the shed can lead to a season of pats, one painful moment can create ongoing fear for the cow.

Improving stockperson skills is one way of ensuring tail damage doesn't occur. This takes time, and sometimes the best people can only do so much with poor handling facilities, but damaged tails never go away.

Creating policies around stock handling help make sure everyone knows what, why, and how things are done on your farm with your stock.

OUR FARM PROCEDURE

Stock handling – how we keep our cows and ourselves safe and well

Always be aware of the count around you. Stay behind kick rails when possible, avoid getting in the race with cattle, and always have an escape route planned.

We take the following steps to move our cows into a bale, crush, truck, etc:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

We take the following steps to restrain our cows in a bale, crush, etc:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

If we have a kiddy cow, we mark her by _____
We don't use tail tape as it can hurt our cows if it's not done well.

We trim tails by _____

If we see a severely damaged tail we _____
and then we record it here _____

To avoid people being hurt when handling or restraining cows, we _____

We protect our cows' tails by _____

This farm is committed to keeping our cows and ourselves safe and well. We will take action to minimise tail damage on-farm.

Signed by the whole farm team

Date created

Next review date

0800 4 DAIRYNZ | DairyNZ

“ We consider tail damage an important animal welfare matter. Our farm policy covers this. Animal handling skills and empathy with stock are important to us when we employ staff. ”

The tail tells a story

Tails of different animals have different functions- from balancing and gripping, to attracting mates, to showing happiness and communicating other emotions.

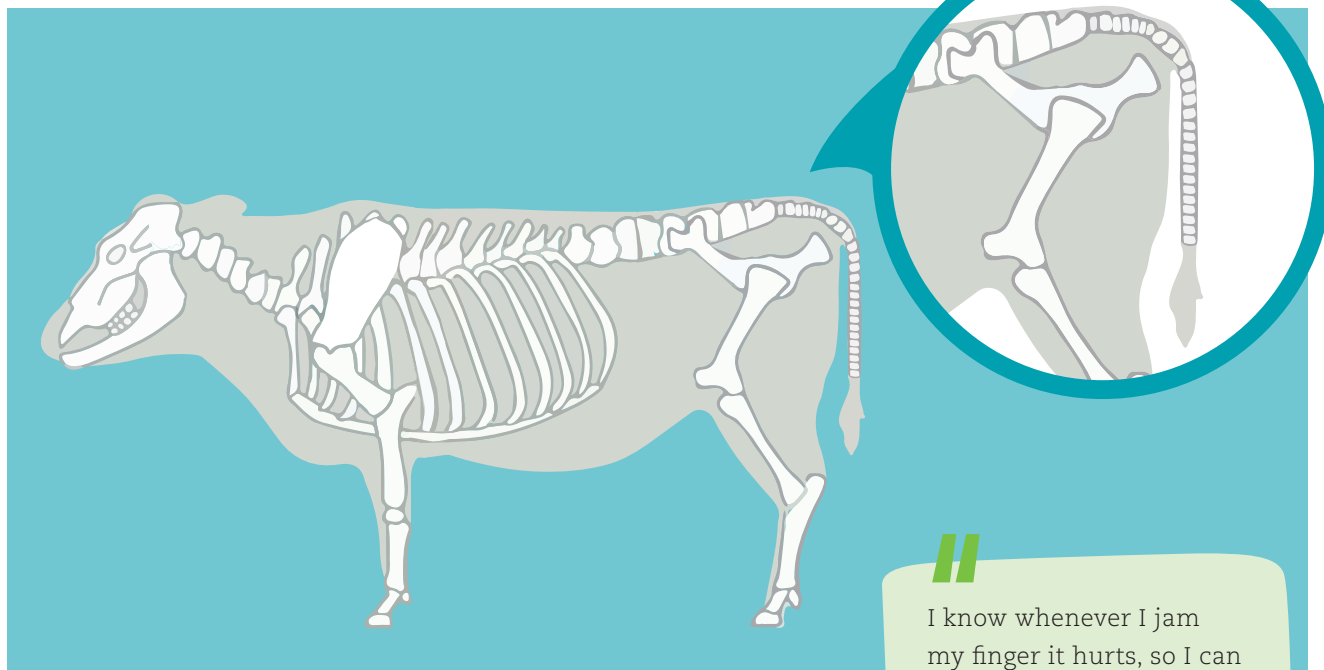
As with other animals, a cow's tail is an important signalling device that has purpose:

- During oestrus, the tail is slightly lifted. We also use the tailhead for heat detection aids such as tail paint and heat mount detectors.
- The tail physically lifts during urination and defecation
- A common sign that a cow is going to calve is when she raises her tail like a flag and swishes it from side to side.
- The tail is used to swat flies or other irritations.
- Tails are lifted when calves and cows play or run.

Tail damage is not only painful, it can also impact how a cow communicates with her world.



What's in a tail?



The tail is made up of vertebrae and is an extension of the spine. There are about 18-20 vertebrae in a cow's tail. Cows have about 207 bones in their body, so their tail makes up almost 10 percent of those bones.

“ I know whenever I jam my finger it hurts, so I can imagine how much it hurts when one of our cows has an injured tail. ”

What would you do if she didn't have a tail?

It might be tempting to handle tails when restraining or moving cows, but it's important to think about how cows might be feeling in these situations. Cows may be scared, sore, or nervous, and handling their tails creates the risk of injury. To minimise damage, there are several other things you can try before handling tails.

Change the environment

- Minimise anything that is scary for a cow like loud sounds, shadows, and blocked exits.
- Use food such as meal or molasses to entice her and create a positive experience.
- Bring in other settled animals. Cows like being with other cows - safety in numbers.



Restrain

- Crushes, vet races and head bales help keep stock handling safe and easy.
- Kick bars, if used properly and taken off when finished, can help prevent kicking.
- If possible, tying the cow's leg down versus up is more natural to the cow and can reduce stress during restraint.

Scrum

- One or two people can use their shoulder or back to push up against the rump of the cow to encourage her to move forward.



We train our team for any situation where people may be tempted to handle tails. We find other ways to calm the cows in those instances.



Heifer training

Handling heifers before they calve and introducing them to the shed can reduce stress on animals and people, increase milk let down, and create a safer working environment. Time and patience are needed but it will pay off in the long run.

- Work calmly and gently- poor handling will increase heifers' fear of people.
- Introduce them slowly over several days- leave them on the yard, open gates, turn machines on, etc.
- Use a feeding system if you have it to entice heifers and teach them there's food in the shed.
- Use training gates to help push heifers up.
- Teat spray to get heifers used to the feeling and reduce mastitis.

Handling tails as a last resort

If you must handle tails, it's important to do so in a way that does not cause pain or damage to the cow.

- Handle the tail in its natural range of motion - don't put it in a position the cow wouldn't herself.
- Hold the tail at the base to lift it and do not lift higher than spine height.
- Avoid grabbing, bending, or twisting the tail.

It's important to communicate your handling policies to your relief milkers, calf rearers, veterinarians, transporters, graziers, etc.



It's a habit issue. It's no longer acceptable to handle tails. I've recorded damaged tails on the whole herd since 2016 for this purpose and highlighted court cases to staff to communicate the seriousness.



Safe handling

Stay aware of your surroundings - cows can be unpredictable. Stay behind kick rails when possible, avoid getting in the race with cattle, and always have an escape route planned.

Working with animals that aren't behaving as you want them to can be stressful and frustrating. It's important to make sure our emotions aren't impacting on the way we care for our animals. As a team, it's useful to work out where the risks are to make sure you're not pushing to the point where people or animals get hurt. Develop strategies to avoid injuries such as:

- Allowing for breathers
- Swapping tired teammates out for fresh teammates
- Providing extra teammates for heifer training and first milkings
- Knowing when to pull the pin - does the job need to be done today?

Keeping tails intact

Keep tail hair trimmed to prevent tails getting caught in equipment and to prevent the build up of muck which can lead to tail injuries. Switches can be trimmed using hand shears, scissors, or electric trimmers.

Avoid using tail tape as an identification tool- if the tape gets dirty and left on it can lead to tail damage.



We trim tails once they've calved and use it as a marker- it's another way of identifying they've calved. Then we do another trim mid-season and one more at the end of the season so they're clean for dry off and go into winter with clean tails.



Tail audits

Many farmers get their vet to do an annual tail audit to monitor tail damage. It's important to track changes and identify how and why any new tail damage occurs. Farm teams are the best group to identify where the challenges are to find solutions.

Annual tail audits are the most valuable once heifers enter the herd or after changes in the farm team, to create a benchmark to identify any handling issues. Having accurate records also allows you to track whether tail damage occurs on-farm or at off-farm grazing.

Check that your vet uses the national tail scoring standard. This will ensure scoring and reporting consistency so that you can compare your herd's results year on year, regardless of where you farm or what vet you use.

It's important to record damaged tails once a year so you know if new injuries are happening.

"If you don't record and benchmark how can you know you have a problem or work to fix it?"

Caring for damaged tails

Regulations require any shortening of damaged tails to be carried out by a vet and pain relief given.

If you see a damaged tail that needs shortening:

- Draft the cow out
- Call your vet
- Record the injury
- Discuss after care and pain relief with your vet
- Review the cause to prevent damage to other tails



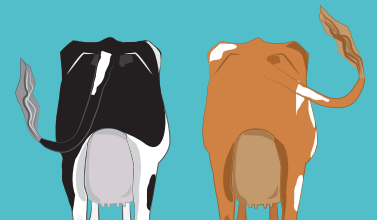
Tail breaking on-farm

Reporting a potential tail breaking concern within your farm business can seem like a confronting step, but it shows you care about your animals, it protects your reputation, and it's the right thing to do.

If you suspect you have an issue with tail breaking on farm, call MPI at 0800 00 83 33. An Animal Welfare Inspector will work with you to set up a tail assessment meeting during milking. They will let you know if there's anything you need to prepare before the visit. Records such as tail audits and stock handling policies and trainings may be useful.

Investigations are carried out on a case by case basis. MPI may talk to everyone on your farm team. It's important that MPI can get as much information as possible to make informed decisions to protect your animals. Tail breaking is a breach of the Animal Welfare Act and likely constitutes serious misconduct.

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- 1 _____
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If we have a kicky cow, we mark her by _____

We don't use tail tape as it can hurt our cows if it's not done well.

We trim tails by: _____

If we see a newly damaged tail we _____
and then we record it here _____

To avoid people being hurt when handling or restraining cows, we _____

We protect our cows' tails by _____

This farm is committed to keeping our cows and ourselves safe and well. We will take action to minimise tail damage on-farm.

(Signed by the whole farm team)

Date created

Next review date

DNZ50-042