

PDCA unveils new dairy cow scorecard

by Ted Halbach

THE question I get more than any other from youth and their coaches is, “What scorecard should I be using?”

Since 1943, the Purebred Dairy Cattle Association’s Dairy Cow Unified Scorecard has served as the basis for type evaluations in the United States. This scorecard is based on the concept of comparing a dairy cow to “True Type” using a 100-point scale. For many years, each of the breed associations also used the major breakdowns of the PDCA scorecard to calculate final scores within their respective type classification programs. In recent years, however, the breed groups have moved away from using the PDCA card. Instead, they developed their own scoring systems to address the specific needs of their breeds.

Unfortunately, each introduction of a new breed classification scorecard added to the confusion among both youth and adult judges. PDCA members recognized the industry’s need for a unified type scorecard and moved ahead to revise the scorecard. In April, the association’s board approved an updated version.

These changes were made in light of recent research and are designed to place more emphasis on traits and characteristics associated with a

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longer productive life, anatomical functionality, and industry management trends in housing systems and animal welfare.

The new PDCA scorecard makes the following improvements:

- Balances the cow’s dairy and strength characteristics. The new PDCA card makes clear the preference for cows with open body structures and adequate substance to promote the capacity, health, and vigor necessary to sustain high production levels for multiple lactations.
- Makes movement and locomotion a priority in the evaluation of feet and legs.
- Reduces the value placed on stature. Research shows that stature has increased dramatically among all dairy breeds the last 15 years, creating problems with current stall sizes and putting cattle at greater risk of injury.

You will notice several significant changes in the new scorecard.

- There are now four major breakdowns instead of five. This is because “Dairy Character” and “Body Capacity” were combined to create “Dairy Strength” with a 25 percent weighting.
- “Rear Feet and Legs” receives more weight; it now accounts for 20 percent of the overall score.
- The traits for each major breakdown are listed in priority order along with the point value of each trait. For example, “Movement”



is worth 5 points, 25 percent of the “Rear Feet and Legs” evaluation.

• Under the “Breed Characteristics” (on page 2), the new card lists specific breed exceptions to the weighting of various traits. For example, Holstein Association USA specifies that fore and rear udders are each worth 7 points (these traits are worth 9 and 5 points, respectively, for the other breeds). This gives each breed group a way to place more priority on specific traits without creating an independent scorecard.



Hoard’s Dairyman has reproduced the breakdowns for the PDCA scorecard on this page. The entire PDCA scorecard can be found under Dairyman Extras at www.hoards.com. It will also be available on the web from PDCA and its member breed associations. A printed version will be available at a later date.

Purebred Dairy Cow Unified Scorecard — major trait descriptions

There are four major breakdowns on which to base a cow’s evaluation. Each trait is broken down into body parts to be considered and ranked.

Frame - 15% — The skeletal parts of the cow, with the exception of rear feet and legs. Listed in priority order, the descriptions of the traits to be considered are as follows:

Rump (5 points): Should be long and wide throughout. Pin bones should be slightly lower than hip bones with adequate width between the pins. Thurls should be wide apart. Vulva should be nearly vertical and the anus should not be recessed. Tail head should set slightly above and neatly between pin bones with freedom from coarseness. **Front End (5 points):** Adequate constitution with front legs straight, wide apart, and squarely placed. Shoulder blades and elbows set firmly against the chest wall. The crops should have adequate fullness blending into the shoulders. **Back/Loin (2 points):** Back should be straight and strong, with loin broad, strong, and nearly level. **Stature (2 points):** Height including length in the leg bones with a long bone pattern throughout the body structure. Height at withers and hips should be relatively proportionate. Age and breed stature recommendations are to be considered. **Breed Characteristics (1 point):** Exhibiting overall style and balance. Head should be feminine, clean-cut, slightly dished with broad muzzle, large open nostrils and strong jaw.

Dairy Strength - 25% — A combination of dairy-ness and strength that supports sustained production and longevity. Major consideration is given to general openness and angularity while maintaining strength, width of chest, spring of fore rib, and substance of bone

without coarseness. Body condition should be appropriate for stage of lactation. Listed in priority order, the descriptions of the traits to be considered are as follows:

Ribs (8 points): Wide apart. Rib bones wide, flat, deep, and slanted towards the rear. Well sprung, expressing fullness and extending outside the point of elbows. **Chest (6 points):** Deep and wide floor showing capacity for vital organs, with well-sprung fore ribs. **Barrel (4 points):** Long, with adequate depth and width, increasing toward the rear with a deep flank. **Thighs (2 points):** Lean, incurving to flat and wide apart from the rear. **Neck (2 points):** Long, lean, and blending smoothly into shoulders; clean-cut throat, dewlap, and brisket. **Withers (2 points):** Sharp with chine prominent. **Skin (1 point):** Thin, loose, and pliable.

Rear Feet and Legs - 20% — Feet and rear legs are evaluated. Evidence of mobility is given major consideration. Listed in priority order, the descriptions of the traits to be considered are as follows:

Movement (5 points): The use of feet and rear legs, including length and direction of step. When walking naturally, the stride should be long and fluid with the rear feet nearly replacing the front feet. **Rear Legs-Side View (3 points):** Moderate set (angle) to the hock. **Rear Legs-Rear View (3 points):** Straight, wide apart with feet squarely placed. **Feet (3 points):** Steep

angle and deep heel with short, well-rounded closed toes. **Thurl Position (2 points):** Near central placement between the hip and pin bones. **Hocks (2 points):** Adequate flexibility with freedom from swelling. **Bone (1 point):** Flat and clean with adequate substance. **Pasterns (1 point):** Short and strong with some flexibility, having a moderate, upright angle.

Udder - 40% — The udder traits are evaluated. Major consideration is given to the traits that contribute to high milk yield and a long productive life. Listed in priority order, the descriptions of the traits to be considered are as follows:

Udder Depth (10 points): Moderate depth relative to the hock with adequate capacity and clearance. Consideration is given to lactation number and age. **Rear Udder (9 points):** Wide and high, firmly attached with uniform width from top to bottom and slightly rounded to udder floor. **Teat Placement (5 points):** Squarely placed under each quarter, plumb and properly spaced. **Udder Cleft (5 points):** Evidence of a strong suspensory ligament indicated by clearly defined halving. **Fore Udder (5 points):** Firmly attached with moderate length and ample capacity. **Teats (3 points):** Cylindrical shape; uniform size with medium length and diameter; neither short nor long is desirable. **Udder Balance and Texture (3 points):** Udder floor level as viewed from the side. Quarters evenly balanced; soft, pliable, and well collapsed after milking. (Note: In the Holstein breed, an equal emphasis is placed on fore and rear udder (7 points each). All other traits are the same as listed above.)



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