

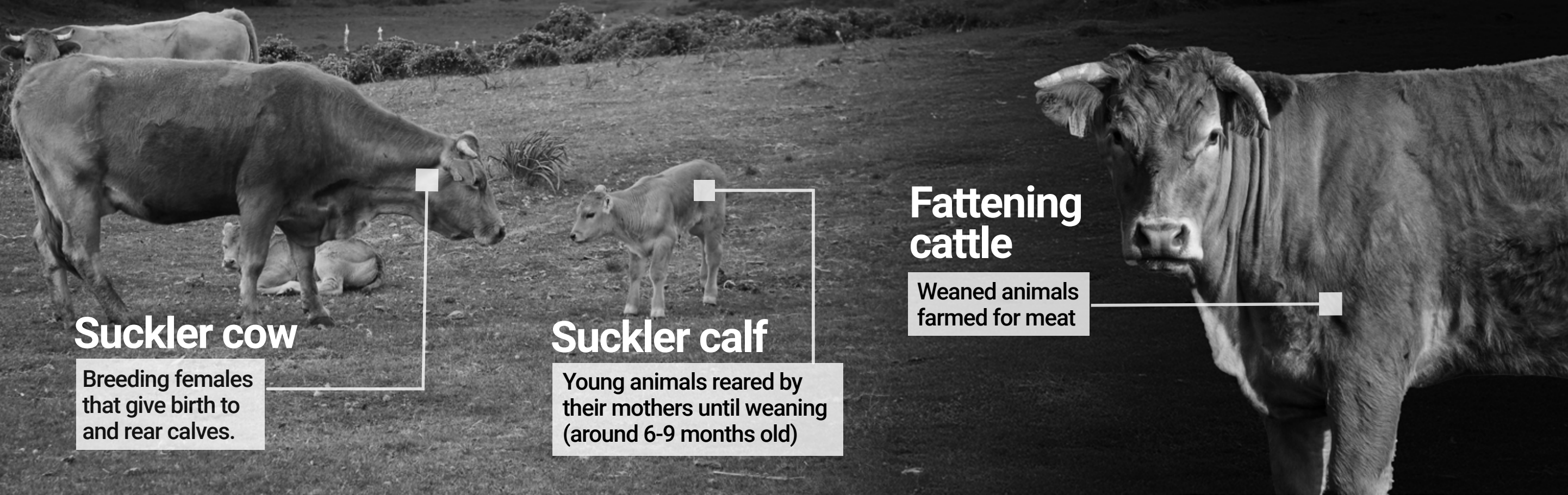
Welfare of beef cattle on farm

Beef cattle are farmed in different ways across the EU — some are housed indoors, others kept on pasture or in feedlots. EFSA’s scientists have reviewed the latest evidence and provided recommendations to improve their welfare, focusing on housing, diet and general wellbeing.

What do we mean by beef cattle?

Beef cattle are animals raised primarily for the **production of meat**

This includes:



Improving welfare: What to focus on?



Water access

Cattle must have access to **clean, fresh water** at all times.

- Large open troughs are ideal — they allow natural drinking behaviour
- At least two drinkers per group help avoid competition and ensure access
- Avoid nipple drinkers — they restrict natural water intake



Feeding

High-concentrate diets (grain-heavy) can lead to **digestive problems** like rumen acidosis.

- Include more structured fibre and roughage in the diet
- Exclude feed that’s mouldy as it can contain mycotoxins
- Allow gradual diet transition after arrival on farm (over 4 weeks)



Flooring and comfort

Uncomfortable flooring increases discomfort and the risk of injuries and lameness.

- Avoid bare concrete — it causes resting problems and slipping
- Rubber mats over slatted concrete floors can improve conditions
- Straw-bedded floors are the most comfortable



Space allowance

Overcrowding in housing leads to discomfort, stress and injury.

- Provide around 13 m² per animal to allow movement and simultaneous resting
- Allow 60 cm of feeding space per animal to avoid competition
- More space improves comfort and reduces welfare problems



Outdoor access and enrichment

Cattle need **space and stimulation** to stay healthy and content.

- Access to outdoor loafing areas encourage natural behaviour
- Brushes, fiber or other enrichment objects encourage play and investigation



Cattle on pasture

Pasture offers **benefits** but needs good management.

- Always provide access to clean water, shade, and shelter
- In cold or wet weather, ensure a dry lying area is available
- Monitor for signs of cold or heat stress, and protect from predators where needed



Group stability

Mixing unfamiliar animals can cause aggression and stress.

- Keep groups stable whenever possible
- If mixing of animals is needed, do it when animals are young and include some familiar individuals
- Extra space and feeding points help in establishing a new group



Mutilations

Procedures like castration, disbudding, and tail docking **are painful**.

- These should be avoided unless strictly necessary for medical reasons
- If performed, always use anaesthesia and analgesia — regardless of age

Good animal welfare practices not only promote intrinsic animal wellbeing but also help to make animals healthier. This is a key element for the safety of the food chain considering the close links between animal welfare, animal health and foodborne diseases, in line with the principles of One Health.