DUNG SCORING IN ADULT CATTLE

Can the dung tell you if the cow is sick?

5 scores. 25 patterns. The same score can be normal in one cow and a warning in another.

1 2 3 4 5

Swipe >>

Same score.
Different animal.
Different meaning.

SCORE 2: Loose

Normal in an HF cow on lush pasture or silage.
A warning in a desi cow or buffalo: too much concentrate and too little roughage.

SCORE 3: Porridge

An HF cow on TMR gives a soft pad, 1 to 1.5 inches high.
A Gir cow or buffalo gives a firmer, taller cake, 1.5 to 2.5 inches high.

SCORE 4: Thick

Normal in a dry, non-lactating cow.
A warning in a high-yielding HF cow (energy deficit) and in desi cattle or buffalo (protein starvation).

SCORE 5: Hard pellets

Normal in a far-off dry cow.
A warning in a fresh cow (gut stasis) and in peak summer (dehydration).

1

WATERY

Part 1 of 2

Flat puddle with a wide water ring. Colour is the main clue.

Dark green: lush fodder flush

Look for Flat green puddle with fine plant particles. No foam and no foul smell.

Action Stop lush green fodder for 24 to 48 hours. Give 2 to 4 kg of dry straw first.

Mustard yellow with bubbles: acute acidosis

Look for Thin yellow liquid covered with tiny bubbles. Rumen pH has crashed.

Action Remove grain and concentrate. Give dry straw and ask your vet about a rumen buffer.

Black and tarry: bleeding in the upper gut

Look for Sticky black dung with a metallic smell. It stains concrete dark.

Action Isolate the cow and call a vet. Check the eyes and vulva for paleness.

Bright red: bleeding in the lower gut

Look for Watery dung with red streaks or blood clots. Think coccidiosis or salmonellosis.

Action Isolate the animal and call a vet. These infections spread to people, so wash hands and boots.

1

WATERY

Flat puddle with a wide water ring. Colour is the main clue.

Pale grey clay: bile deficit or liver problem

Look for Watery dung with no brown or green colour and a rancid smell.

Action Check the eyes and gums for jaundice. Keep the cow away from mouldy feed and call a vet.

Muddy green-brown with mucus: parasites

Look for Watery dung with slimy mucus streaks and no bubbles. Think worms or fluke.

Action Send a fresh sample for a faecal test, then deworm as your vet advises.

Dark and explosive: winter dysentery

Look for Dark green-brown dung that jets out, seen in many cows at once.

Action Isolate sick cows, give oral fluids and keep the shed ventilated. Expect a sharp milk drop.

Dull grey-yellow with mucus sheets: mycotoxins

Look for Loose dung with thick mucus sheets in over 20% of the herd. No bubbles.

Action Stop feeding mouldy silage and add a toxin binder to the ration.

2 LOOSE

Thin sheet, 0.2 to 1 inch high. No rings and no central dimple.

Jade to sage green, glossy: normal pasture dung

Look for Thin runny pat that is smooth and shiny, with no foam or mucus.

Action Nothing to change. Watch the milk fat for a sharp drop.

Olive-khaki with oily shine: normal silage dung

Look for Thin runny pat that is glossy, with no foam or mucus.

Action Keep the ration the same. The shine shows good fermentation.

Mustard yellow with bubbles: sub-acute acidosis (SARA)

Look for Frothy, broken-looking pat with mucus and whole grain kernels.

Action Add chopped dry straw to the TMR, check for feed sorting and add a rumen buffer.

Dark green and slick: excess degradable protein

Look for Dark green slippery pat under 1 inch, with a fluid ring and no bubbles.

Action Cut soluble protein such as young berseem or raw soya. Add fermentable energy like cracked maize.

2 LOOSE

Thin sheet, 0.2 to 1 inch high. No rings and no central dimple.

Olive-brown and very thin: roughage deficit

Look for Pat under half an inch in a desi cow or buffalo, with no bubbles.

Action Give longer dry fodder. Keep roughage to concentrate at 60:40 or better.

Muddy green-brown with slime: chronic parasites

Look for Flat, custard-like dung coated with mucus and no foam.

Action Test a fresh faecal sample first, then deworm as your vet advises.

Pea-soup grey-green: Johne's disease

Look for Runny dung that never normalises, in a thin cow with visible ribs and hip bones.

Action Confirm with a blood ELISA or faecal PCR and isolate her. There is no cure.

3

PORRIDGE

GOLD STANDARD

Rises 1 to 2.5 inches with rings, a soft central dimple and no water ring.

HF or crossbred on silage or TMR

Look for Olive-brown to khaki pad, 1 to 1.5 inches high. Glossy, with no whole grain.

Action Rumen fermentation is at its best. Keep the ration and bunk management the same.

Cow on pasture or green fodder

Look for Deep green pad, 1 to 1.5 inches high, with neat rings and a clear dimple.

Action Keep the current grazing schedule or green to dry fodder ratio.

Desi cow or buffalo

Look for Dark olive-brown firm cake, 1.5 to 2.5 inches high, with a deep dimple.

Action Keep the balance of dry straw, green fodder and oil cake (khal).

Same score, different ideal. Breed and diet matter.

4

THICK

Stiff, doughy mound over 2 inches high. Steep edges, dull surface, no shine.

Dull brown: energy deficit in a lactating HF cow

Look for Doughy stack over 2 inches with coarse fibre pieces longer than half an inch.

Action Feed younger silage, add energy and give free water. This is normal in a dry cow.

Grey-brown tower: protein starvation in desi cattle or buffalo

Look for Dry stack over 3 inches with steep edges and long unbroken straw.

Action Add green fodder or oil cake. Test the drinking water for salt.

Ink black and matte: oak or heavy metal poisoning

Look for Very small quantity of sticky, clay-like, dull black dung.

Action Move the animals away from the source and call a vet at once.

5 HARD PELLETS

Dry, segmented balls stacked over 4 inches. They break like clay.

Dark brown-grey in a fresh cow: gut stasis

Look for Hard dry balls like horse dung, in a cow within 30 days of calving.

Action Check for low calcium, displaced abomasum and ketosis. Call a vet.

Baked-clay brown and cracked: dehydration

Look for Hard, cracked chunks with no moisture, common in peak summer.

Action Check water troughs: clean, shaded and fast-filling. Look for heat stress.

Rich straw brown: a normal far-off dry cow

Look for Firm, segmented stack 2 to 3.5 inches high, in normal volume.

Action No problem. Continue the dry cow ration and move to the close-up ration 21 days before calving.

Dark red-black jelly clots: bloody gut (HBS)

Look for Very little dung, with a few hard bits inside sticky dark red clots.

Action Over 85% die. Call a vet immediately, as surgery may be the only option.

Dung is the cheapest diagnostic test on the farm.

This is a screening tool, not a replacement for clinical examination. But it helps us catch problems earlier.

Which dung patterns do you see in the field that a simple 1 to 5 score misses?