



Ohio State University Extension

Veal Calf Care – Starts at the Dairy Farm: Best Practices for Dairy Bull Calves

Dr. Marissa Hake, Midwest Veal, LLC @CALFVET on FB and Instagram

****At a Glance -- Calf care on the dairy farm is critical to early success of calves entering the veal market ****

Veal calves are a small, but successful portion of the U.S. dairy industry. As a veterinarian who works exclusively with veal calves, I've found there is a lot of misunderstanding about the veal industry, even among dairy farmers. The success of calves entering the veal market is highly dependent on early care at the dairy farm. All of the same principles of calf care used for heifers should be applied to care of bulls, regardless if they are entering the beef or veal market.

What is a veal calf? The American veal calf industry is split into two major markets, the formula-fed veal calf and the bob veal calf. USDA reports 479,900 calves were harvested in 2016.

Formula-fed Veal (*also known as milk-fed or special-fed*)

- **Approximately 85% of the veal consumed in the U.S. is formula-fed veal.** These calves are marketed around **6 months old (approximately 450 to 500 lb)** and are consuming milk and grain, which makes them very different than their bob-veal counterparts.
- Drug residues originating from the dairy farm are less likely in this class of veal because of age at processing.

Bob Veal

- **Less than 10% of total volume of all veal marketed today is bob veal.** Bob veal calves are usually sold directly from the dairy farm to a meat processor or through a sale barn to a meat processor for harvesting. Calves typically **weigh less than 150 lb.**
- Because of bob veal's proximity to slaughter, the potential for residue violations originating at the dairy is higher.
- Dairy producers should be very careful not to use medications that can cause residues.

Best practices for on-farm care of dairy bull calves entering the veal market include:

- **Most importantly** - Adequate, clean and timely colostrum is given even if immediately transported off of the farm – 10% of calf's body weight should be fed within 2 hours of birth^{1,2}
- Navels are disinfected with 7% tincture iodine or 1:1 Chlorhexidine/70% alcohol within 30 minutes of birth²
- Adequate food and water is provided to maintain health, growth, and vitality²
- Vaccines, if needed, given for enteric and respiratory diseases are approved by a veterinarian
- Clean, dry and sanitary housing is provided with proper ventilation and biosecurity
- All calves have identification³
- Veal calves do not need to be castrated or dehorned
- Care and oversight is provided from trained calf care takers
- Do not sell or transport sick or injured calves

Communication and transparency between dairy and calf buyer/veal grower

- Have a good relationship and open communication between both parties
- Ensure that all medication, treatments and vaccines are documented and provided as needed
- Know which market the calves will be entering - special-fed veal or bob veal

Medications and Treatments

- Veal calves should not be denied treatment for disease on the dairy farm if warranted – Follow all withdrawal times
- Keep records of all treatments and identify calves
- Medicated milk replacer and milk from treated cows should be avoided in calves intended for veal
- Avoid treating calves with medications that are not labeled for use in veal calves
- Work with veterinarian to develop appropriate treatment protocols for dairy bulls entering the veal market

Calf Handling

- Calves are handled in a calm, controlled and gentle manner
- Calves are moved from the dairy onto the truck or in the auction market by walking or lifting them, or using clean, properly designed mechanical transport devices.
- Animal caretakers are trained to handle and restrain calves with minimum stress to the animal
- The consequences of inhumane handling are known and enforced. Calves can be injured if they are dragged, pulled or caught by the neck, ears, limbs, tail or any other extremities, or if they are thrown. The Veal Quality Assurance program does not tolerate abusive behavior of animals.⁴

Calves, regardless of gender and future use, should have proper care to ensure they can thrive and prosper. Young calf treatment should not be based on financial motivations, but rather considered a welfare standard for all calves.

About The Beef Checkoff:

The Beef Checkoff Program (www.MyBeefCheckoff.com) was established as part of the 1985 Farm Bill. The checkoff assesses \$1 per head on the sale of live domestic and imported cattle, in addition to a comparable assessment on imported beef and beef products. In states with qualified beef councils, states may retain up to 50 cents of the dollar and forward the other 50 cents per head to the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board, which administers the national checkoff program, subject to USDA approval.

Best Practices for Dairy Calf Care are provided as part of the Veal Quality Assurance Program funded by the beef checkoff.



¹Dairy Calf and Heifer Association – Gold Standard – Colostrum Harvest and delivery

²Dairy Calf and Heifer Association – Gold Standard – New Born Care

³<http://www.nationaldairyfarm.com/sites/default/files/Version-3-Manual.pdf>

⁴<http://www.vealfarm.com/certification-resources/>

More information and resources are available on www.VealFarm.com

OHIO DAIRY INDUSTRY RESOURCES CENTER

Department of Animal Sciences

2029 Fyffe Court

Columbus, Ohio 43210

Phone: 614-688-3059

Email: eastridge.1@osu.edu
