

THE Connection

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IN THIS ISSUE

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VFO announces leadership

Spotting navel infections

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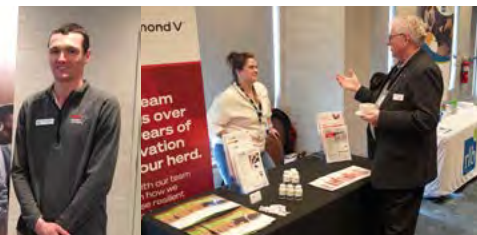
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Chair's MESSAGE



Philip Kroesbergen

Grounded in strength, growing toward new beginnings

As many of you know, Jennifer Haley, our long-serving Executive Director, is retiring at the end of March after 28 years of service to Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) and the dairy calf and veal cattle sectors. At our recent Annual General Meeting (AGM), the Board and staff took the opportunity to thank Jen and recognize her with VFO's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Jen's leadership over the years has helped shaped policy, strengthened partnerships, and elevated standards of care and professionalism across every corner of our industry. Jen has been a mentor, an advocate, a steady hand guiding our organization over the years, and perhaps most importantly, a champion for people.

From the beginning, Jen was instrumental in tackling key issues that shaped the future of veal farming in Ontario. One of her early triumphs involved lobbying for marketing funds allocated to the Beef Information Center to be returned to the Ontario Veal Association (OVA) so that veal could finally have its own dedicated provincial marketing programs. That work laid the foundation for what would eventually become a robust consumer marketing portfolio including programs like the *Certified Ontario Veal Program* and, of course, the search for *Ontario's Best Veal Sandwich*.

Jen was a steadfast advocate for producers through some of the most challenging moments in our industry's history: the BSE crisis and border closures, the countervail and anti-dumping issue, the removal of implants, not one but two weight limit increases, and the pressures of animal activism. Through each of these challenges, Jen ensured the veal voice was not only present at the table, but heard and respected.

Her leadership was also central to one of the most significant milestones in our sector's history: achieving independent marketing board status. The transition from the OVA to VFO in 2015 was a monumental achievement and one that required vision, persistence, and a profound understanding of both policy and people. Under Jen's leadership, VFO became the strong, unified, and influential organization it is today.

Jen has always understood the power of collaboration. She fostered strong relationships with government, industry partners, and producer groups across the beef and dairy sectors. She built connections provincially and nationally, always ensuring Ontario veal producers were represented with professionalism and integrity. Her ability to bring people together, including board members, staff, industry partners, and policymakers, has been one of her greatest strengths.

Jen's commitment to animal care has remained constant. Jen recognized early on the importance of giving all calves the best possible start. Her leadership helped establish the biennial Healthy Calf Conference in 2004, drive research investments in male dairy calves, and support programs that continue to improve animal health and welfare across the sector.

It is with deepest gratitude that we thank Jen for her vision, dedication, and the foundation she has laid for the future. VFO is immensely grateful for the knowledge, passion, and steadfast advocacy that Jen brought to her role, consistently championing the Ontario and Canadian veal sectors. We wish her all the best as she retires from VFO and starts a new chapter.

As we move forward, I would like to congratulate Patrick on his new role with VFO as he moves into the position of Executive Director. Patrick has a clear appreciation for the opportunities and challenges facing our sector and I am confident he will build on the strong foundation established at VFO and help position Ontario's veal and dairy calf producers for continued success.

I would like to also take a moment to thank retiring VFO Director Kurtis Moesker who has completed his time on the Board and is stepping away to focus his attention on his farm and family. Thank you Kurtis for bringing your perspective to our Board table and contributing to the success of VFO.

A warm welcome to Kevin Bowman who is joining the Board as an appointed Director completing the term vacated by Cory Streicher, who stepped away as he pursued new business ventures. I look forward to working with Kevin and the rest of our Board and staff in the year ahead, as we continue to tackle the important issues facing our sector and advocate for our members.

With the warmer weather, spring planting is approaching and we get the itch to get out on the land. This is a time of renewal and new beginnings as we optimistically look ahead to a new season. The same can be said for VFO as we start a new chapter and look ahead, open to possibilities, opportunities, and embracing constant change and evolution. 🍷



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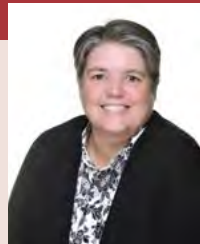
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Jennifer Haley

A career defined by purpose, collaboration, and making a difference

The time has come where I am approaching my final few days with Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO). It seems like yesterday that I started working with the Ontario Veal Association (OVA). Time really does go by far too fast. Some of you will know that my initial position within the industry was as the Veal Projects Coordinator with the Ontario Cattlemen's Association (now Beef Farmers of Ontario) back in the Fall of 1997.

Little did I know at the time that I would be retiring from a role that has changed many times over the years and where I was valued, respected, and felt that I truly made a difference to those that I served. From the very first Annual General Meeting to today, the industry has thrived on connection, communication, and collaboration to ensure our collective voices could be heard.

The first person I met and worked with was OVA President Ian Foster and how lucky for me that I was able to be mentored by someone who was so passionate about the sector and doing what was right to move the industry forward. I have no doubt that I would not be where I am today without Ian's coaching, mentoring, support, teaching, and guidance. Ian and I made a lot of important decisions together that would shape the future of the sector, and I knew I could always count on Ian's support no matter how hard the topic was we had to tackle.

I would like to also thank Judy Dirksen, who was the OVA Chair for 10 years and helped lead the organization into VFO. Judy has given so much to this sector with her dedication and leadership over the past 25 years. Thank you to VFO Chairs Brian Keunen, Tom Kroesbergen, Pascal Bouilly, and Philip Kroesbergen for your guidance, perspectives, and leadership.

Over the course of my career, we have had to fight to have a seat at the table to make sure the veal voice was heard. It wasn't always easy and there were a lot of conversations and discussions where we never backed down. But with the support of the Board, we took on the important battles to effect important change that has shaped who and what VFO is today. As I pass the torch on, it is critical that the industry maintain its seat. We have the respect of our

industry colleagues and have earned our place. We need to keep showing up and contributing to the many conversations that shape policy and regulations that impact all livestock farmers. This is a long game not a short one and the investment of time, dialogues, and interactions pays dividends to those who invest.

I have had the privilege of representing the veal industry on several important committees and organizations provincially and nationally over the years. I have represented the sector internationally at various events and conferences and appreciated the opportunity to learn and explore new challenges and opportunities along the way. As some of you know, I did not grow up on a farm and early on I was told I could not possibly understand what it was like to be a farmer since I had never fed calves before. I worked hard to understand the sector challenges, find strategic ways to position the sector, and seize opportunities that benefit members. While I may never have owned any cattle, I cared deeply for this sector as if I did.

Working to bring the Canadian Veal Association (CVA) into fruition was another major milestone for the sector and elevated the veal voice at the federal level. There was a time where maybe this would never happen, but with patience, vision, and commitment, the CVA has continued to keep the lines of communication open. I have been very fortunate to have worked with CVA President Bob Wynands on the many issues impacting our sector, as Bob was the translator, go-between, and facilitator for a lot of important discussions. I have appreciated a continuous dialogue with my Quebec colleagues and counterparts over the years where we have respected our differences and emphasized those issues we have in common.

I have had the good fortune to have worked with a lot of amazing people. Board members – both past and present – who have given so much of their time to better the industry, even when it meant time away from their farms and businesses. Your leadership and vision inspired me to reach higher and go further. I have been grateful for the many industry colleagues who

I have worked alongside and the relationships we have built together over the years have meant the world to me and I will always cherish them. While the work may come and go, and the issues may change, it will be the people I will miss the most.

I especially want to acknowledge the VFO team – the people who make things happen and keep punching above their weight time and again. Kendra, Jen, and Patrick are the very definition of dedicated, knowledgeable and service-focused people. They want what is best for the sector now and moving forward. I would like to congratulate Patrick as he takes on the role of Executive Director and wish him all the best. Patrick's understanding of the sector and its challenges and opportunities positions him well. Combined with the steadfast support from Jen Bullock, they will make a great team.

Leaving something you love and have built over the years is not easy, but I leave with a heart full of gratitude and appreciation for all of the experiences I have had, the people I have met, the lessons I have learned, the contributions made, the home runs and the strike outs, the ups and downs, and everything in between. It has been one heck of a ride, and I am proud to have served the dairy calf and veal cattle sector.

As some of you know, it is time to slow down, and I will be taking on a part time role as Executive Director with the Toronto Stock Yards Land Development Board. An organization whose work is critically important to the financial well being of VFO and other livestock groups. I look forward to this new challenge and continuing the legacy of this organization.

So, while it is goodbye for now, it is not farewell. I will be supporting VFO during the transition and it will never be far from my thoughts as I cheer you on from the sidelines. Thank you to everyone for your support, encouragement, and trust. The veal sector will always have a piece of my heart, and I look forward to seeing how the next chapter unfolds for us all.

Jen



2026 VFO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & PRODUCER EDUCATION DAY HIGHLIGHTS



Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) was pleased to welcome attendees to our 2026 Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Producer Education Day on Wednesday, March 18, 2026, at The GrandWay Events Centre in Elora, Ontario.

Industry leaders shared an overview of the key projects and priority issues VFO has undertaken over the past year, along with highlights from our 2025 programming.

Thank you to our members, industry partners, sponsors, and special guests who were able to join us. We appreciate your support!



Learn more about VFO's 2025 initiatives in our Annual Report available online at vealfarmers.ca.



VFO was pleased to welcome Paul Vickers, Parliamentary Assistant (PA) to the Honourable Trevor Jones, Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Agribusiness, to our 2026 AGM. PA Vickers delivered greetings and introduced a video message on behalf of Minister Jones, congratulating Jennifer Haley on her well-earned retirement.



VFO was also pleased to welcome William George, Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission (OFPMC) Member and Chair of the Veal Industry Advisory Council to our 2026 AGM. George provided greetings on behalf of Brendan Byrne, OFPMC Chair, to VFO and the membership.

Producer Education Day



Amanda Hammell, Senior Manager with MNP's Farm Management Consulting team, offered practical strategies to manage rising costs and access the capital veal farms need for growth.



Titouan Chapelain, PhD student at the University of Guelph, covered practical strategies for feeding dairy-cross calves, focusing on colostrum, milk replacer composition, milk volume, and a low-stress weaning transition.



Dr. Jeff Caswell, a veterinarian, veterinary pathologist, and professor at the Ontario Veterinary College, shared his research on *Mycoplasma bovis* and what matters most for controlling it in groups of calves.

Watch for recordings of each presentation later this spring!



VFO recognized retiring Director Kurtis Moesker for his service and dedication to the Ontario veal cattle and dairy calf sector. Moesker played a key role in introducing Ontario grain-fed veal to the "Foods From Our Farms" lunch menu at the South Western Ontario Dairy Symposium, an accomplishment that highlights the strong connection between the dairy and veal sectors.

Annual VFO Board of Director's Award winner announced

Recognizing dedication and service to the veal cattle industry



Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) was pleased to announce this year's VFO Board of Director's Award winner at its recent Annual General Meeting and Producer Education Day held Wednesday, March 18, 2026, in Elora, Ontario.

The VFO Board of Director's Award celebrates the many individuals whose efforts help the Board fulfill its mandate of supporting a strong, sustainable livestock sector in Ontario and providing proactive, engaged leadership for the province's dairy calf and veal cattle farmers. This year, the VFO Board proudly recognized Kendra Keels for her outstanding commitment and service to our sector.

With more than 35 years of experience in the livestock, dairy calf, and veal industries, Kendra's influence has been profound. As VFO's Industry Development Director, she has played a pivotal role in shaping producer programs, educational tools, and research initiatives that continue to strengthen our sector.

"Kendra Keels has dedicated her career to improving animal health and welfare in the Ontario and Canadian veal sectors," says VFO Chair Philip Kroesbergen. "Her passion and commitment have been instrumental to our organization and have shaped the work we do every day. We are grateful to Kendra for being a true leader, a tireless advocate, and a trusted voice for our sector."

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Jennifer Haley honoured with Lifetime Achievement Award

Recognizing dedication and service to the veal cattle industry



Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) was pleased to announce the recipient of the second Lifetime Achievement Award at its recent Annual General Meeting and Producer Education Day held Wednesday, March 18, 2026, in Elora, Ontario.

The Lifetime Achievement Award honours individuals whose exceptional vision and dedication have significantly shaped VFO and the legacy Ontario Veal Association, recognizing the profound impact their lifelong contributions have had on the growth and strength of the Ontario veal cattle sector. As the industry continues to evolve, this award serves as an important reminder of the leaders who have advanced its long-term success.

This year, the VFO Board proudly presented the award to Jennifer Haley, VFO's long-serving Executive Director, who will retire at the end of March after 28 years of outstanding service.

"On behalf of the VFO Board of Directors, I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Jennifer Haley for her dedicated service and commitment to the veal cattle sector," says VFO Chair Philip Kroesbergen. "Jennifer's leadership has guided our organization through significant milestones and achievements and has helped navigate our sector through pivotal events that have shaped the industry we know today."

"We are immensely grateful for the knowledge, passion, and steadfast advocacy Jennifer has brought to her role," adds Kroesbergen.

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Veal Farmers of Ontario announces leadership for 2026

Re-election of Kroesbergen as Chair, Yantzi, Vice Chair



Philip Kroesbergen, Chair



Dylan Yantzi, Vice Chair

Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) is pleased to announce the re-election of Middlesex County veal producer Philip Kroesbergen as Chair and Dylan Yantzi (Tavistock) as Vice Chair, at a recent meeting of the Board of Directors.

Kroesbergen, who joined the VFO Board in 2017, farms full-time with his father and brother near Strathroy. Their family operation, Creekside Acres, has been raising veal cattle exclusively for over 30 years. Kroesbergen previously served as Vice Chair in 2020, returning to the Executive in the fall of 2022.

Yantzi was acclaimed to the VFO Board at the 2026 Annual General Meeting held on March 18 in Elora, Ontario and will serve a three-year term. He was appointed to the VFO Board in 2021 and has served as Vice Chair since 2023.

Joining the VFO Board of Directors is Kevin Bowman, an experienced veal cattle producer from Fordwich. Bowman was appointed to a two-year term by VFO to fill a vacancy left by Cory Streicher who stepped down from the Board in December 2025.

Also returning to the eight member VFO Board of Directors are Judy Dirksen (Harriston), Aaron Keunen (Palmerston), Kyle Roes (Millbank), and Tom Oudshoorn (Auburn). One seat remains vacant from retiring VFO Director Kurtis Moesker and will be filled by VFO through an appointment.

“On behalf of the VFO Board of Directors, I would like to thank Kurtis for his leadership and dedicated service to the Ontario veal industry,” says Kroesbergen. “We are pleased to welcome Kevin to the Board and look forward to the fresh perspective he will bring to our discussions. Our strength remains in our collaborative approach and shared commitment to a sustainable, thriving dairy calf and veal cattle sector.” 🐄



L to R: Dylan Yantzi, Tom Oudshoorn, Aaron Keunen, Philip Kroesbergen, Judy Dirksen, Kevin Bowman, Kyle Roes

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Veal Farmers of Ontario appoints Patrick MacCarthy as Executive Director



Patrick MacCarthy, Executive Director Designate

On behalf of the Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) Board of Directors, VFO Chair Philip Kroesbergen is pleased to announce the appointment of Patrick MacCarthy to the role of Executive Director, effective April 1, 2026.

The VFO Board selected MacCarthy for his extensive understanding of Ontario's veal and dairy calf sectors and his commitment to producer-focused advocacy. MacCarthy succeeds Jennifer Haley, who is retiring from VFO on March 31, 2026, after nearly 30 years of dedicated service to the Ontario and Canadian veal and dairy calf sectors.

“On behalf of the VFO Board, we are excited to welcome Patrick as Executive Director,” said Kroesbergen. “Patrick brings a collaborative leadership style, strategic insight, and a clear appreciation for the opportunities and challenges facing our sector. We are confident he will build on the strong foundation established at VFO and help position Ontario's veal and dairy calf producers for continued success.”

Originally from Eastern Ontario, MacCarthy joined VFO in 2020 and has worked on a variety of important projects and issues impacting the sector, most recently serving as Policy Advisor since November 2024. MacCarthy has developed a strong understanding of the unique structure, challenges, and opportunities within Ontario's veal and dairy calf sectors, working closely with producers, processors, government representatives, and national industry partners. A graduate of the University of Guelph with a Bachelor of Commerce in agricultural business, MacCarthy brings both sector-specific expertise and forward-looking strategic insight to the role.

“I am honoured to take on the leadership of Veal Farmers of Ontario and to work on behalf of Ontario's veal and dairy calf producers,” said MacCarthy. “Having worked within VFO and alongside our members, I have a deep appreciation for the legacy, strength, and resiliency of this sector. I look forward to building on our solid foundation while bringing new ideas and approaches that will help position Ontario's veal and dairy calf industry for long-term sustainability.”

The VFO Board also extends its sincere gratitude to Jennifer Haley for her extraordinary leadership and commitment over the past 28 years. 🐄



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Value of sodium bicarbonate in veal cattle diets

Chad Mader, Beef Cattle Specialist

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Agribusiness

The risk of acidosis when feeding high-grain diets is familiar to most veal producers. Starch fermentation in the rumen results in the production of acids, which are utilized by the animal as an energy source. Acid production (and a corresponding drop in pH) is normal every time an animal eats, but if the drop is too dramatic, or if it lasts too long, it can have negative impacts for the animal. These excessively acidic conditions can impact the activity of the rumen microbes, as well as cause tissue damage to the rumen itself, both of which reduce the rumen's ability to function effectively. The more starch that is ingested, the more fermentation occurs, and the higher the risk of acidosis. Animals that are not accustomed to high-grain diets are at an increased risk. Transitioning to higher-grain diets too quickly can cause a spike in starch fermentation, leading to sudden drops in pH. Acidosis is always a concern in veal production, but weaning can be a time of increased risk, as calves transition away from milk to higher total grain intake.

Sodium bicarbonate (SB) is a buffer, which means it moderates pH changes when acidic (or basic) substances are introduced. It has long been used in ruminant diets to help control pH fluctuations in the rumen. This article will discuss the potential effectiveness of SB in grain-fed veal production.

Vicente et al, 2022 compared three different levels of SB to a diet containing soy hulls in high-grain lamb feedlot diets. They found that their mid-level rate of SB inclusion was associated with significantly higher feed intake and average daily gain, with no impact on carcass characteristics. The group fed pelleted soy hulls (as a fibre source) in place of the SB performed similarly to the mid-level SB group – suggesting that the proper rate of SB has a similar effect to appropriate levels of fibre in the diet.

Paton et al, 2006 investigated the effects of SB – either blended in the ration or offered free-choice – on both Holstein cows and Jersey steers fed a high-concentrate diet. They saw no difference in average rumen pH with either mixed or free-choice SB as compared to the same diet with no buffer. All animals in the study experienced regular bouts of subclinical acidosis (pH below 5.8), but when SB was mixed into the diet, the number of those bouts that exceeded four hours were significantly less. This is an important detail, as multiple studies have shown that it is long, continuous periods of low pH that do the most damage to rumen microbes


and the rumen itself. This study also showed highly variable levels of SB intake when it was provided free-choice, suggesting that free-choice is not an effective way to ensure adequate SB consumption.


Gonzalez et al, 2008 examined the effect of various levels of SB inclusion in high-concentrate diets of Holstein heifers, including free choice access to straw. In this case, all levels of SB inclusion resulted in less time where the rumen pH was below 5.8 compared to the control that received no SB. They saw no difference in overall feed intake, but the group with the lowest level of SB inclusion consumed more grain than the control or the higher levels of SB. The groups with higher levels of SB consumed more straw – and had lower average daily gain. Similarly to Paton et al, this study showed no overall difference in rumen pH with any level of SB, but all levels of SB did result in lower total time below pH 5.8 than the group with no SB. While it is not clear why higher levels of SB were associated with lower grain intake, this does highlight the importance of finding the appropriate level of SB inclusion.


So, what does all this tell us? Can SB influence rumen pH? Definitely! Will it solve all your acidosis problems? Of course not! Because of its chemical buffering ability, it can influence pH, but as with all buffers, it has limits. No one tool will prevent acidosis. SB is best considered as one control option, rather than the solution. While the research described above did not show SB to have any effect on reducing the severity of pH drops, it may have some ability to reduce the length of time the rumen stays below 5.8, which is important for rumen health and therefore overall animal performance.

Despite the research results outlined above, on-farm management practices are likely to have more impact on acidosis than SB. Appropriate fibre levels in the diet can result in similar performance to SB supplementation, so finding the right level of forage inclusion in high-grain rations often eliminates the need for SB. If increasing forage beyond a certain level significantly reduces weight gain and there are still acidosis concerns, perhaps forage adjustment and SB supplementation in combination will yield positive results. Feed delivery schedules, bunk management, and appropriate transition rations are all great ways to reduce calves' chances of suffering from acidosis. Variations in feed intake are always detrimental, so ensuring consistent access to fresh feed critical. The feedlot sector spends a lot of time thinking about 'step-up' rations to

transition cattle to high-grain diets with as little digestive challenges as possible. While this can be a very effective strategy, it is certainly easier to implement for feeder cattle coming from high-forage diets than it is for veal cattle who never really have a high-forage stage. Nonetheless, veal producers are encouraged to work with a nutritionist to provide a gradual transition to higher grain consumption.

There is evidence that SB can be a useful tool in controlling acidosis, but as outlined, it is just one of a variety of options. Producers struggling with acidosis, variable feed intake, or challenges during diet transitions should speak to their nutritionist or feed supplier to explore options for incorporating SB into your feeding program. From the research outlined above, it appears that incorporation into the diet is a better option than offering free choice, as it ensures appropriate intake. It is also critical to find the appropriate level, as in all the studies discussed, it appears that there is a 'sweet spot' where SB is most effective. Unfortunately, it is difficult to provide general recommendations for the right level of SB, as it will depend on animal type, stage of growth, and other feed ingredients. Discussing the specifics of your operation directly with your nutritionist is the best option. They will also be able to provide specific cost details, which will help you determine if the production benefit you hope to see from the SB generates an economic return. 



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The hidden challenge: Spotting and treating navel infections in calves

Calf Care Corner

FROM SCIENCE TO PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS



Umbilical health is a critical yet often overlooked aspect of calf management. Proper care of the umbilical cord significantly impacts a calf's long-term health and productivity. Umbilical infections affect 19 to 27 per cent of calves, leading to complications such as hernias, joint infections, and poor growth.

Causes of umbilical infections

At birth, the rupture of the umbilical cord creates an entry point for bacteria. Several factors increase the risk of infection:

- Poor hygiene in calving areas – Contaminated bedding exposes newborns to harmful bacteria
- Delayed drying of the umbilical cord – Moist conditions promote bacterial growth
- Inadequate navel care – Lack of disinfectant treatment allows infections to develop

Identifying umbilical infections

Early detection is key to effective treatment. Producers should watch for:

- Swollen or enlarged umbilicus (greater than 1.3 cm in diameter)
- Heat, pain, or discharge from the umbilical area
- Flinching or discomfort when touched
- Lethargy or poor appetite, indicating systemic infection

Studies suggest many infections go undiagnosed, reinforcing the need for routine monitoring.

Navel scoring: A tool for early detection

Navel scoring helps producers identify problems before they worsen. This system evaluates size, heat, pain, and discharge, assigning a severity score from 0 to 3. A score of 0 indicates a healthy navel, while higher scores signal infection risks. By integrating navel scoring into calf health assessments, producers can detect infections sooner and act quickly.

Hygiene practices and infection prevention

A clean, dry environment is critical to reducing bacterial exposure. Producers should:

- Use deep, clean bedding to prevent moisture build-up; do the kneel test to double-check
- Maintain proper ventilation to minimize the spread of bacteria
- Disinfect calving pens before use and replace bedding regularly
- Dip the umbilical cord in iodine or chlorhexidine immediately after birth

Routine navel scoring allows for early intervention when infection signs appear. Combining hygiene with proactive monitoring leads to stronger, healthier calves.

Holistic management for umbilical health

Effective care extends beyond navel disinfection. A holistic approach includes:

- Optimal colostrum intake – Newborns need four litres within 30 minutes of birth, followed by two litres within eight hours to build immunity. Continued feeding of three litres twice daily for the first three days strengthens resistance to infections
- Biofilm awareness – Milk delivery systems can accumulate biofilm, harboring bacteria. Regular sanitation is essential
- Monitoring milk feeding behavior – Changes in appetite can indicate underlying health issues

The economic impact of umbilical infections

Ignoring umbilical health can be costly. Treatment expenses, including labour and medication, add up quickly, especially in today's competitive market. Additionally, affected calves experience slower growth rates and increased mortality, reducing overall productivity.

Conclusion

Umbilical health requires active management from birth. By maintaining clean environments, monitoring calves for signs of infection, utilizing navel scoring, and adopting holistic care strategies, producers can significantly improve calf welfare and performance. 🐄



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NAVEL HEALTH

Prevention is key!

Recent studies in Canada show that between 19 to 27% of calves can have an enlarged or abnormal umbilicus (navel). Before shipping male dairy calves off the farm, double-check to ensure the navel is well-healed and dry. This is best done by palpating (feeling) the navel.

It is estimated that an infected navel can cost around \$40 in losses.

<h3>Unhealed</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure calving area is clean, dry and free of manure • Dip with 7% iodine or 2% chlorhexidine • Follow navel care protocol 	
<h3>Healing</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor daily to ensure normal healing process, about 9 days • Maintain clean calf housing and provide adequate bedding • Infection can occur within the first 3 weeks 	
<h3>Infected</h3>	<p>If the navel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is greater than 1.3 cm • Has pain • Has heat • Has discharge <p>Then:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow navel care protocol • Treat • Observe meat withdrawal 	
<h3>Hernia</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The umbilical ring fails to close after birth • Abdominal contents protrude through the opening (the area around the navel will feel mushy) • If umbilical ring is greater than 6 cm consult veterinarian 	
<h3>Completely healed</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Off to a great start! • Maintain clean calf housing and continue to provide adequate bedding 	

Note: A calf with an infected navel is unfit to be transported.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT WWW.CALFCARE.CA

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Veal Farmers of Ontario launch new *Dining with Ontario Veal* initiative

Ontario **VEAL** appeal

Spotlight on creating connections with consumers, farmers, and restaurants

Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) recently launched a new consumer program called *Dining with Ontario Veal*, a province-wide initiative supported by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Agribusiness (OMAFRA). This project aims to raise year-round awareness of Ontario grain-fed veal, highlight the restaurants and chefs who feature it, and deepen consumer understanding of the quality, versatility, and culinary experience that Ontario veal offers.

With funding from the Government of Ontario, *Dining with Ontario Veal* will help showcase restaurants serving exceptional veal dishes, spotlight chefs and culinary stories across the province, introduce a new online restaurant discovery map, and feature a monthly “hero restaurant” visit and video segment with television personality and Ontario Veal Appeal (OVA) ambassador John Catucci. The program will also include targeted social media content, ambassador-led restaurant reviews, and opportunities for community-based events and activations.

“Our government is proud to support the Veal Farmers of Ontario’s marketing campaign which benefits our farmers, our local economy and protects our local food system,” said Trevor Jones, Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Agribusiness. “By showcasing restaurants and chefs bringing Ontario-raised veal to restaurant tables, VFO is highlighting the excellent quality of our local food while

supporting the farmers in our communities who make this excellence possible.”

“We are delighted to launch this initiative with the support of OMAFA,” said Jennifer Haley, Executive Director of VFO. “More and more Ontarians are looking for authentic food experiences close to home. *Dining with Ontario Veal* will shine a spotlight on the incredible chefs and restaurants working with Ontario veal, and the many different delicious and creative menu items that feature grain-fed veal. While we’re well known for our Search for *Ontario’s Best Veal Sandwich* contest, this initiative allows us to celebrate the full range of veal dishes found across the province and give consumers engaging new ways to discover and enjoy veal all year long.”

Beginning in 2026, VFO will feature a new hero restaurant each month, including on-site video content captured with John Catucci, as well as curated events led by participating restaurants. Weekly restaurant reviews and ongoing ambassador-driven content will highlight veal dishes across Ontario, encouraging consumers to explore and support local veal offerings.

Our inaugural *Dining with Ontario Veal* restaurant to be featured was Mt. Vesuvio’s in Brampton in February. Together with the father and daughter owners Maurizio and Fabiana, their special guests were invited to an exclusive meal hosted by John Catucci. The evening was a celebration of flavour, tradition,

and beautifully prepared Ontario grain-fed veal. Guests enjoyed three standout dishes – vibrant Veal Pizzaiola, rich Osso Buco, and a silky Veal Marsala – each showcasing just how versatile and tender grain-fed veal can be.

With a team of Brand Ambassadors visiting restaurants all across Ontario, the project will continually post new restaurants to visit and enjoy on the OVA social media platforms. As well, participating restaurants will be part of a dynamic map on the ontariovealappeal.ca website.

Through these project activities, VFO aims to enhance visibility for Ontario veal, strengthen partnerships across the value chain, and inspire consumers to enjoy veal beyond traditional occasions. The initiative supports local food systems and promotes meaningful connections between consumers, restaurants, and Ontario farmers.

To follow along, visit ontariovealappeal.ca and find Ontario Veal Appeal on social media channels @ontariovealappeal.

The Project is funded (or funded in part) by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.



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Measuring financial performance with ratios

John Molenhuis, Business Analysis & Cost of Production Specialist
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Agribusiness

Using financial ratios is one of the most common and effective methods for farm businesses to evaluate their financial performance. Ratios, when compared to industry benchmarks or internal targets, are useful to gauge an operation's performance. A single ratio cannot effectively gauge the financial performance of an operation. Where a single ratio can indicate a weakness, understanding the relationships between ratios can be very useful in identifying the source of a weakness.

Dupont Company developed a method termed the Dupont Analysis Approach to analyse an operation by assessing the relationships between operating performance measures. The three measures used in their analysis are operating profit margin, asset turnover, and return on assets (ROA).

Operating profit margin

$$\frac{(\text{Net farm income} + \text{Interest expenses})}{\text{Gross farm revenue}} \times 100 = \text{Operating profit margin \%}$$

Operating profit margin measures operating efficiency. Looking at earnings before interest expenses focuses on how well the farm generates profit from its operations before considering how it's financed. The higher the margin the more profitable the business, with a target of achieving a margin of more than 15 per cent.

Asset turnover

$$\frac{\text{Gross farm revenue}}{\text{Total farm assets}} = \text{Asset turnover}$$

Asset turnover ratio measures how efficiently assets are being used to generate revenue. The higher the ratio the more efficiently assets are being utilized to generate sales revenue. A target **asset turnover of at least 0.40** means that every dollar invested in assets is generating at least 40 cents in revenue.

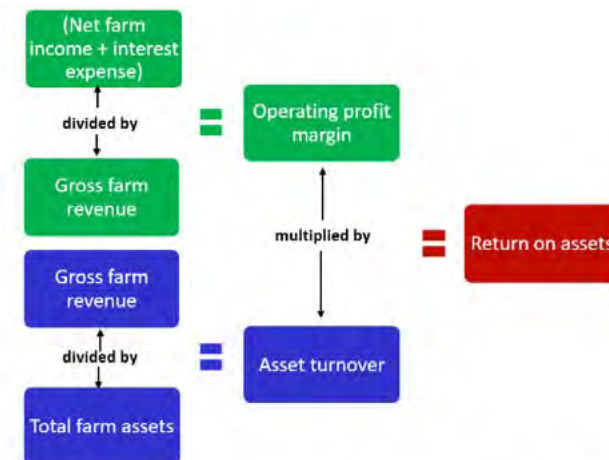
Return on assets

$$\text{Operating profit margin} \times \text{Asset turnover} = \text{Return on assets}$$

ROA measures profitability and how well the business is utilizing their assets to generate a profit. **An ROA of five per cent** or more is a good target.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between the ratios and the financial data that is used to calculate the measures. A farm with a strong ROA can be a result of high profitability (operating profit margin) and using its assets more efficiently (asset turnover). If ROA is lower than desired, a farm can look to improve its operating profit margin or its asset turnover.

Figure 1. Ratio analysis for farm operations*



* Ratio Analysis Approach based on Dupont Analysis developed by the Dupont Company

Consider the scenarios of the two farms below. They both have an ROA of 3.0% and would like to increase to 5.0%. Farm A's asset turnover of 0.20 is below target while Farm B's 7.5% operating profit margin is less than desired.

Farm A: Strong operating profit margin and weak asset turnover

$$15\% \text{ operating profit margin} \times 0.20 \text{ asset turnover} = 3.0\% \text{ ROA}$$

The financial data used to calculate asset turnover is shown in Figure 1; to improve this ratio Farm A will need to look at their gross farm revenue and total farm assets. Some options to improve this ratio are as follows.

- All assets are being used to full capacity to contribute to increasing sales revenue
- Liquidating non-productive or underutilized assets
- Accessing assets through custom farmwork, leasing or renting

Farm B: Strong asset turnover and weak operating profit margin

$$7.5\% \text{ operating profit margin} \times 0.40 \text{ asset turnover} = 3.0\% \text{ ROA}$$

To increase operating profit margin, Farm B needs to improve cost control and increase productivity or marketing efforts to increase market sales. Some options to improve this ratio are as follows.

- Decreasing days on feed to increase the number of turns through a feedlot, thereby increasing annual sales
- Analyse top costs to look for ways to decrease costs while not impacting sales negatively

The other ratios should not be ignored; you do not want to focus all your time and energy on the weak areas to the detriment of the strong areas. But looking at ways to improve in areas with weaker results is a good place to start.

Understanding the relationships between key performance measures will assist you in making management decisions to improve your farm operation. Drilling down into the operating profit margin and asset turnover components of the ROA may highlight sources of strength and weaknesses that could be improved.

Updates to the OBCFPP

On January 1, 2026, the *Protecting Farmers from Non-Payment Act* and its new regulations came into effect. These new regulations, which are the result of an extensive consultation process, in which Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) was pleased to participate in, strengthen the Ontario Beef Cattle Financial Protection Program (OBCFPP) to better protect sellers if a buyer does not pay.

The OBCFPP, which also includes veal cattle, is an important business risk management tool for the veal sector. There are some new and important requirements producers must follow to stay protected and ensure program coverage, which include:

- Having a written agreement with the buyer for every sale of veal cattle
- Pay required financial protection program check-off fees
- Notify the Director promptly if you know a buyer has become insolvent or stopped operating

More information on the OBCFPP can be found on agricorp.com.



VFO proposes regulation changes

As part of the VFO Board of Directors' recent review of its regulations and governance, the VFO Board is proposing three amendments to *Ontario Regulation 272/14 Veal Cattle Plan*. These amendments will reduce the size of the Board of Directors from eight to six producers, increase the board term eligibility from three three-year terms to four three-year terms, and remove the March 15 deadline for VFO to hold its Annual General Meeting (AGM).

The VFO Board conducted extensive member consultation on these proposed amendments with all VFO members being mailed a copy of the proposal, along with information on the proposed changes being posted on vealfarmers.ca and in the weekly VFO e-newsletter. At VFO's AGM on March 18, 2026, the proposed amendments were discussed in detail and member feedback was solicited. These proposed amendments ensure that VFO can continue to meet the needs of the sector while remaining responsive, reflective, and responsible to dairy calf and veal cattle producers. VFO is now preparing a submission requesting the proposed amendments to the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission for their review and consideration.

Canadian Veal Association



Association canadienne du veau

CVA advocates in support of CUSMA

As Canada prepares for the first joint review of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA), the Canadian Veal Association (CVA) was pleased to have the opportunity to advocate in support of this critical free trade agreement. In both a joint agriculture sector-wide letter and in the Global Affairs Canada consultations, the CVA highlighted the importance of free trade to the highly integrated North American livestock and meat supply chain. The United States is the principal market for Canadian veal exports, with over 90 per cent of Canadian veal exports going to the United States. A strong and predictable CUSMA framework enables veal producers to remain competitive, ensures predictable demand, and increases the value of their veal cattle. Looking ahead, the CVA urges the Government of Canada to preserve and strengthen CUSMA's existing framework, maintain its science-based principles, and resist pressures that could fragment trade or impose non-tariff barriers.

CVA expresses concern over AAFC research station closures

In January, as part of broader government cost-cutting measures, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) announced the closure of three research and development centres and four satellite research farms. The CVA expresses serious concern regarding the closure of these research facilities, in particular the closure of the Lacombe Research and Development Centre in Alberta. The Lacombe Research and Development Centre houses an integrated meat science laboratory, which plays a critical role in livestock and meat research in Canada. Research and quality testing conducted at Lacombe have directly supported the CVA's work, including the successful amendment to the Canada Beef Grading Agency's Carcass Grade Requirements Document, which enabled an increase in the allowable veal carcass weight. The CVA has requested that the Government of Canada maintain a national veal carcass quality and grading research program and that the Livestock Carcass Merit and Market Competitiveness Program, under the leadership of Dr. Oscar Lopez, be transferred to another institution. 🐾

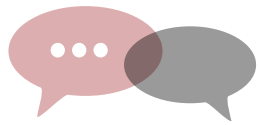


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INDUSTRY UPDATES



VFO attends Dairy Farmers of Ontario AGM



Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) was pleased to join Dairy Farmers of Ontario (DFO) at their Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Toronto in January.

The event offered a valuable chance to connect with dairy producers and engage in conversations about key industry issues alongside our colleagues and partners. We truly value our long-standing partnership with DFO and appreciate their continued support. Ontario Veal Sliders were featured on the lunch menu for the second year in a row.

VFO attends BFO Annual General Meeting



VFO was pleased to attend the Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) AGM in Toronto in February, as an important cattle industry partner.

VFO staff connected with several industry partners, including Ontario Agriculture Minister Trevor Jones and Parliamentary Assistant Paul Vickers.

VFO would also like to congratulate Jason Leblond on his election to BFO President and extend our thanks and appreciation to outgoing President Craig McLaughlin.

VFO attends South Western Ontario Dairy Symposium



VFO attended the South Western Ontario Dairy Symposium in Woodstock in February, connecting with producers and industry partners. From meaningful conversations about current industry challenges to enthusiastic discussions on advancing calf care practices, the event offered a fantastic opportunity to share resources, exchange ideas, and champion the work being done across the sector.

New digital booklet featuring grain-fed veal fact sheets now available

Deciding to raise dairy and dairy-cross calves for the grain-fed veal market presents an exciting and rewarding opportunity when approached with thoughtful planning.

This comprehensive booklet is designed to support your journey, offering a series of fact sheets that answer common questions and provide expert guidance. Whether you're launching a new venture or refining an existing operation, you'll find practical insights to enhance veal cattle performance and build a successful, well-managed business from the ground up.



Find the digital booklet online at vealfarmers.ca.

Join VFO's private Facebook groups

VFO has two private Facebook groups to help foster connections between members, share timely sector updates, and provide a space for discussing producer and industry issues.

The *Marketing of male dairy calves in Ontario* group is designed for dairy and veal producers, and for those starting calves for the dairy-beef market. The *Finishing grain-fed veal in Ontario* group is geared towards producers finishing male dairy cattle for veal markets.

To join, send a request! Both are great forums to ask questions and start conversations. 🐾

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Strengthening the link between veal farmers and consumers

Jessica McCann, Communications Coordinator

Farm & Food Care Ontario

As we begin a new year, the Farm & Food Care Ontario (FFCO) team extends our sincere thanks to you, our partners and members. We deeply value the role our agricultural community plays in advancing our shared mission of growing trust and confidence in our farmers and food system.

In 2025, through its Silver Partnership with FFCO, Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) helped reach millions of Ontarians by connecting them with veal farmers through events, outreach campaigns, and online engagement and digital storytelling. Throughout the year, FFCO and VFO partnered on numerous initiatives that created meaningful opportunities for farming and non-farming communities to connect.



Digital storytelling & reach

Starting in March 2025, the Faces Behind Food project took to GO Transit and TTC stations in the Greater Toronto Area with a poster that prominently features an Ontario veal farmer, alongside other farmers and food producers. The campaign connected with an estimated 14.8 million people, amplifying the real people and stories behind the food they eat.

Through @FacesBehindFood on Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, FFCO shared the stories

of 94 individuals from across Canada. We also answered 30 Ask-a-Farmer questions and ran eight week-long features in which farmers took a deeper dive into telling their stories and answering Canadians' questions, to an audience of 11,206 followers.

Public engagement & events

FFCO continued collaborating with VFO to highlight Ontario veal farming at all three highly successful Breakfast on the Farm events in 2025. Starting on June 14, FFCO partnered with Hoenhorst Farms in Innerkip to welcome more than 2,200 visitors to their dairy farm. In August, more than 1,500 guests visited two Breakfast on the Farm locations in Norfolk County. Finally, FFCO partnered with Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest to bring the farm to the city through FARMtoberfest, for more than 3,000 attendees.

At each event, veal resources were distributed, updated veal farm facts were added to event signage, and at FARMtoberfest a specially developed veal schnitzel recipe was a hit with guests. Additionally, the FarmFood360° veal farm tour was featured at our virtual reality station.

FFCO also participated in several key events

in 2025, further extending the reach of its programs. FFCO, alongside members, spent 10 days at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair (RAWF), showcasing FarmFood360° videos. This interactive exhibit enabled visitors to experience a real Ontario veal farm through virtual reality, attracting thousands of visitors and prompting some of the best conversations our team had at the event. Thousands of additional information sheets and recipes relevant to veal cattle and veal farming were distributed alongside the virtual reality experience over the 10 days at the RAWF.

Farm tours & education

2025 was a strong year for partnering on farm tours that highlighted Ontario's farms and the families behind them. FFCO worked with producers and partners to give participants a genuine, hands-on look at life on the farm and in food processing plants. This program, now in its 21st year, has showcased more than 270 farms and food processing facilities.

FFCO also hosted 12 Virtual Food and Farming Field Trips (nine in partnership with AgScape) reaching more than 35,600 people, these field trips continue to be an accessible way for audiences to experience and ask questions about farming and food in Canada.

Training & member support

Alongside our collaborative work to grow confidence in Ontario's farming and food systems, FFCO also delivered practical support and addressed priority issues for our members.

Highlights of this work included:

- 40 presentations and training sessions facilitated for industry leaders and first responders
- 15,113 resources distributed to 117 fairs and organizations supporting public trust in agriculture
- 29,332 copies of *The Real Dirt on Farming* circulated
- 2,100 digital resource downloads for Local Food Week and Ontario Agriculture Week
- Facilitated two livestock emergency response workshops for Toronto Animal Welfare Services, attended by more than 50 of their staff members

Additionally, FFCO provides many opportunities for members to connect, including quarterly #OntAg communications calls, triannual Member Forum meetings, and professional development events.

What's ahead for 2026?

Members such as VFO are foundational to our organization's and program's success. Together, we have and continue to build momentum and capacity for meaningful connections that bring us closer to our vision of all Canadians having confidence and appreciation for farming and food.



FarmFood360° virtual reality station at FARMtoberfest, that featured a veal farm tour along with several other farm tours

To learn more

To learn more about FFCO's initiatives, visit FarmFoodCareON.org and subscribe to the monthly e-newsletter. Comments and questions can always be directed to FFCO staff at info@farmfoodcare.org.



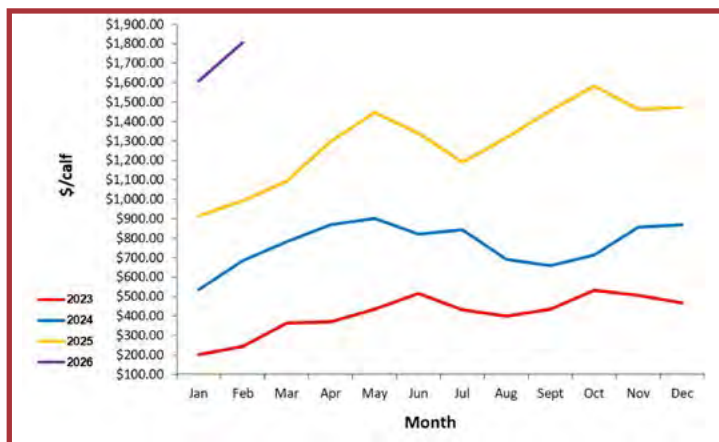
FFCO at the RAWF, where the FarmFood360° veal farm video was featured



VEAL MARKET INFORMATION

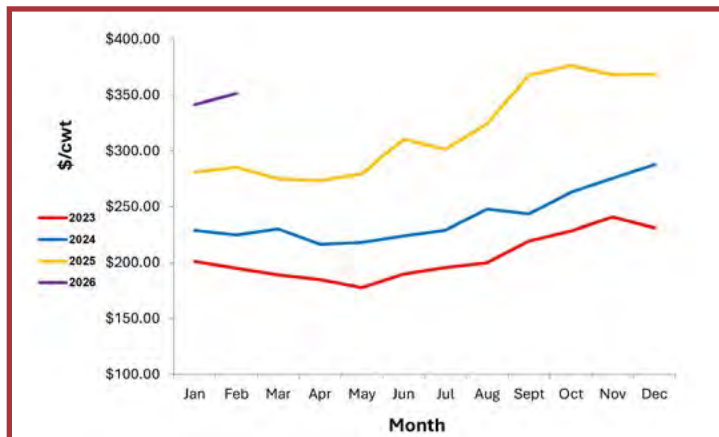
This information is collected from various sources and disseminated by Veal Farmers of Ontario.

Bob Calf Pricing



This price range is collected and tabulated from participating sale barns throughout Ontario based on average pricing. This information is used to follow trends.

Sale Barn Veal Pricing



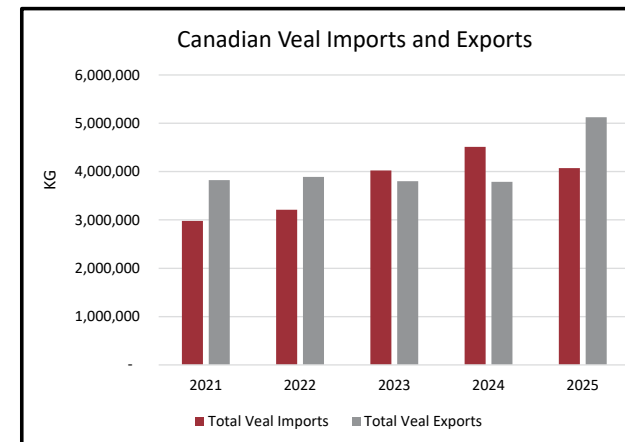
This price range is collected and tabulated from participating sale barns throughout Ontario based on average pricing. This information is used to follow trends.



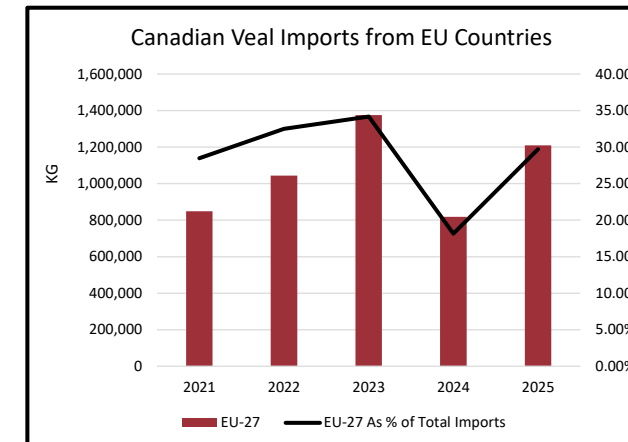
Veal Trade Tracker

31-Dec-25

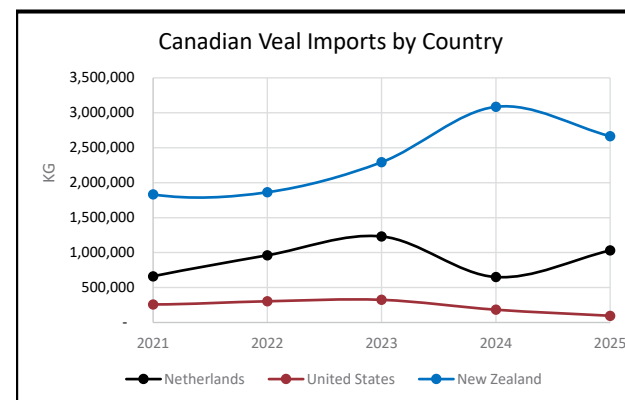
A quarterly snapshot of Canada's veal trade



Throughout 2025 veal exports significantly exceed imports. Compared with 2024, import volumes fell by 10% compared, while exports rose at an even faster pace, increasing by 35% to over 5 million kilograms.



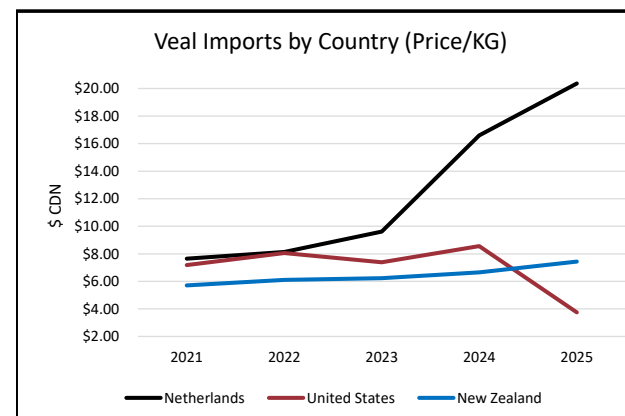
Veal imports from the EU represent 30% of Canada's total veal imports (black line) in 2025. This share has held relatively consistent over the past 5 years. Imports volumes from the EU, primarily the Netherlands, rebounded considerably from 2024 to 1.2 million kilograms.



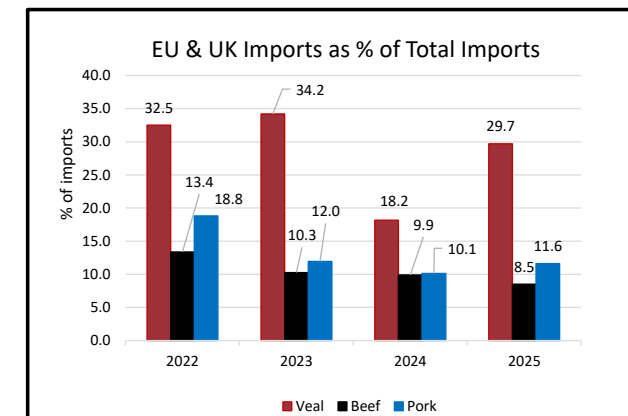
In 2025 imports from the United States remained consistent with 2024 levels. Imports from New Zealand decreased by 15%, while import volumes from the Netherlands rose by 37%.



2025 has the strongest level of veal exports to the USA in the past decade. There is also a slight increase in exports to the Middle East.



The per kilogram price of veal imported from the Netherlands rose significantly again in 2025 and remains notably higher than other countries. The value of American imports has fallen considerably in 2025, while the value of New Zealand imports has held relatively steady.



When compared to beef and pork, the share of veal being imported into Canada from the EU and UK is consistently and significantly higher.

Data retrieved from AAFC and Statistics Canada, red meat section.

FEATURED VEAL RECIPE

Ontario VEAL appeal

Veal Piccata

Cut: Scaloppini/Cutlets | Servings: 4 | Prep Time: 10 minutes | Cook Time: 10 minutes

This is a restaurant classic veal dish that is easy to make and so delicious with tender Ontario grain-fed veal and the lemony sauce.

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp (30 mL) flour
- Paprika and black pepper to taste
- 1 lb (454 g) Ontario veal scaloppini
- 2 1/3 tsp (40 mL) olive oil
- 1/3 cup (80 mL) dry white wine
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) fresh lemon juice
- 1 small bay leaf
- 1 tsp (5 mL) butter
- 1 tsp (5 mL) capers, drained
- Thin lemon slices
- Garnish (optional) chopped parsley

Instructions:

If necessary, pound veal leg cutlets with meat mallet to 1/8" thick. Combine flour, paprika, and pepper in a shallow dish. Lightly coat veal with seasoned flour. Heat oil in 12" skillet over medium heat. Add cutlets, two at a time, and cook 2 minutes on each side or until done. Transfer to serving platter; keep warm. Add wine, lemon juice and bay leaf to skillet, scraping browned bit from bottom of pan. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, stirring frequently, until slightly thickened, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove bay leaf; stir in butter and capers. Spoon over veal. Garnish with lemon slices.

Tip: Avoid frequent turning of the veal, this will tend to dry it out. Cook on one side until juices rise to the surface and then flip cooking each side only once. 🍋



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Licensed dealers

As a veal (bob calves, started/preconditioned calves, and finished veal cattle) producer, you should be dealing with licensed dealers who are remitting veal licence fees/check-off on behalf of the farmers they are collecting from. If you are selling bob calves from your dairy farm, the licence fee/check-off is to be collected and remitted by the person purchasing those calves. If you sell your calves to a sales barn, the licence fees/check-off is remitted on your behalf. Please contact the Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) office to ensure we have your updated contact information, including your email address. If you are dealing with an unlicensed dealer, you are not protected under the Ontario Beef Cattle Financial Protection Program (OBCFPP). You could be in jeopardy of losing the money from the sale, especially if you received a cheque for payment. If it is unclear if the dealer is licensed, ask to see the licence, check the Agricorp website at agricorp.com or contact the VFO office.

2026 VFO licence fee remittances

Ontario Regulation 58/15 Veal Cattle Marketing requires any person who receives veal cattle to deduct from the money payable for the veal cattle any licence fees payable to the local board by the person from whom the veal cattle is received and to forward the licence fees to the local board. Bob calves and preconditioned calves are considered veal cattle. This regulation also includes veal cattle that are sent for custom slaughter.

If you are purchasing male dairy and dairy crossbreed bob calves (up to 150 lbs.) and preconditioned intact male dairy and dairy crossbreed calves (up to 450 lbs.) licence fees are required.

If veal cattle are purchased from a sale barn this does not apply.

Licence fee remittances are due on the 15th of the following month.

Forms 4 and 5 are available on vealfarmers.ca or contact the VFO office to have copies mailed.

Ontario Beef Cattle Financial Protection Program

Agricorp is the Delivery Agent of the OBCFPP and Administrator for the Livestock Financial Protection Board. All communication, including but not limited to: Late Payments Reports, Claims to the Fund, and Licencing inquiries, must be directed to Agricorp. Visit agricorp.com or call 1-888-247-4999 for more information. 🍋

THE Connection

Coordinates and Staff

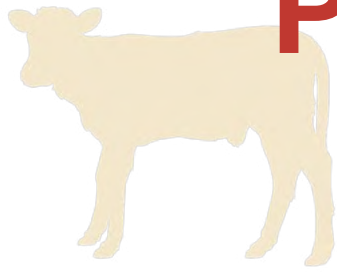
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PRODUCER DAY



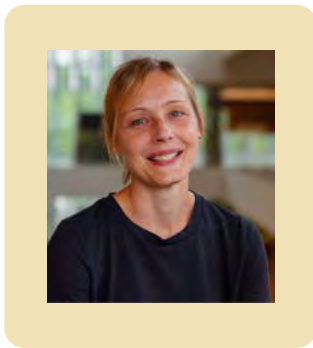
Saturday, May 23rd, 2026



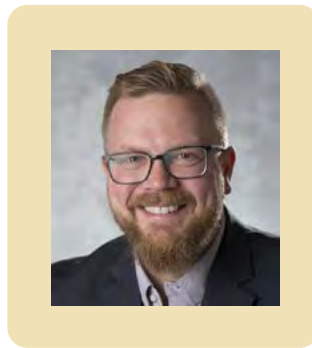
University of Guelph

Join us to learn the most recent advancements in **calf nutrition and management** to **maximize calf health and productivity** throughout the pre-weaning period

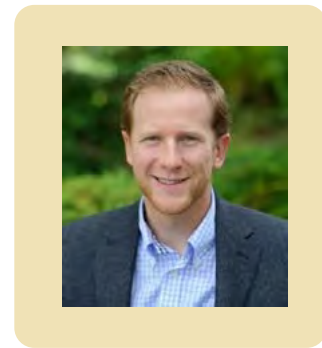
Keynote speakers include:



Dr. Sabine Mann
University of Cornell



Dr. Michael Steele
University of Guelph



Dr. Dave Renaud
University of Guelph



Keynote Presentations: 10:00 am to 2:30 pm
Optional Farm Tour: 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm

Spots are limited - register today!

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