

Veal Welfare Assessment

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As an Ontario veal producer, you are constantly striving to improve animal welfare on farm by adjusting management practices according to current research in order to meet or exceed industry standards for the care of veal cattle.

With the recent update to the “*Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Veal Cattle*” (the final version is expected to be released in this fall), there is no better time to assess welfare on your farm and ensure you are following the requirements of the code. While most farms are already following the new requirements, a welfare assessment can help you benchmark the level of welfare on your farm and identify your farm’s strengths as well as areas to improve in order to provide the best welfare for your herd.

The welfare assessment is simple to complete. You can do it yourself or ask an advisor such as your herd veterinarian to complete it with you. The standards and information you need are all included in the assessment booklet – there’s no need to look anything up.

Having all staff sign the producer declaration at the end of the assessment ensures everyone on the farm understands that animal welfare is a top priority and they are expected to treat animals humanely at all times, as well as report immediately any concerns about welfare. This ensures that all employees understand your farm’s expectations for animal care and that everyone is responsible to hold themselves and others accountable for providing the highest standard of animal care. If anyone questions the animal care at your facility, having documentation demonstrating all staff are aware of expectations and that your farm routinely conducts animal welfare assessments can demonstrate the high level of care cattle receive.

Assessing welfare can pay off, literally. *Growing Forward 2 (GF2)* is a federal-provincial initiative that encourages innovation, competitiveness and market development in Canada's agri-food and agri products sector, and is schedule to wrap up in March of 2018. Through this program, producers applied to have up to half the costs associated with on-farm projects that improve welfare covered by the program. In order for producers to access funding to improve animal welfare on farm, *GF2* requires an animal welfare assessment to be completed by a veterinarian or professional assessor. Although the *GF2* funding program applications have wrapped up, the welfare assessment developed by Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) may help producers access funding to improve animal welfare on their farms under future funding initiatives. VFO will share information on these initiatives as they become available.

Assessing the level of welfare on your farm on a regular basis will help you evaluate the effectiveness of management changes and ensure your farm continues to improve animal care. Assessing welfare is something you subconsciously do every time you go to the barn. Following a more focused assessment can help you get a more complete picture of the welfare of your herd, identify areas for improvement, track progress and keep staff (and yourself) accountable.