

How much are manure tags costing you?

New study shows the true price tag of dirty hides

With cooler, wet temperatures on their way, preventing manure tags is top of mind. Results from the 2016-17 National Beef Quality Audit show that tag costs (manure and mud on the hide) hit about \$30 million, which is in the range of \$10 per head. The study also found that winter was the worst season for dirty hides.

Shipping finished cattle covered with manure tags is a food safety concern. Manure that is embedded in the animal's hair can contaminate the meat at slaughter with harmful pathogens like *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) O157:H7, which causes people who consume contaminated food to become very sick. This bug can live in the intestines of healthy cattle, so you may not have any indication that this pathogen lives on your farm.

"Shipping a dirty animal may hit you in the pocketbook," warns Kendra Keels, Industry Development Director at Veal Farmers of Ontario. "Compromising food safety is no joke. Not only are you creating the potential for contamination, but you're creating more work at the plant by slowing down lines to allow for additional trimming of the carcass. The packer may even stop accepting animals from your farm because the animals you're shipping are a liability."

As a rule of thumb, the Verified Veal Program (VVP) recommends that 75 per cent of calves on-farm have no more than 30 per cent of their



abdomen coated in manure. To help keep calves sufficiently clean at all times, including their flanks and legs, there are a few things you can do:

- 1. Keep cattle bedded and investigate bedding material options.**
- 2. Improve drainage in pens.**
- 3. Avoid overcrowding.**
- 4. Clip cattle with long hair.**

Other factors to consider include diet, housing, overall cattle health and weather conditions. It's important to adjust your bedding needs accordingly to prevent cattle from lying in wet bedding.

The VVP recommends that producers evaluate the calves' cleanliness at shipping and note it in the *Outgoing Veal Record*, which lists the animals being shipped, along with any notes about the cattle such as broken needles. It also verifies that the withdrawal periods for medications and vaccines have been met, providing a little reminder to check the withdrawal dates before shipping to ensure the finished cattle you are marketing are safe. ■

The *Outgoing Veal Record* can be found online at: ontarioveal.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/3.3-Outgoing-Veal-Record.pdf



Figure (a)



Figure (b)

What do you your animals look like at shipping time? While every animal may not be as clean as the one depicted in Figure (a), producers should strive to avoid shipping animals with as much tag as the animal in Figure (b).