

Introduction

The goal of a grain-fed veal farmer is to achieve the desired finish on veal cattle at the right weight and age. Ideally market ready grain-fed veal cattle should weigh between 295 to 320 kg (650 to 705 lbs.) at 28 to 32 weeks (seven to eight months). To achieve this goal, it is critical to have the right feed rations and ratios.

Veal is defined as cattle of any dairy breed or dairy crossbreed dressing no more than 190 kg (419 lbs.). This converts to a live weight of roughly 349 kg (769 lbs.), which is reached at approximately eight months of age. Producers are strongly encouraged to target a dress weight of 180 kg (397 lbs.) to maintain some flexibility within the system to manage veal carcass weights.

- Average daily gain (ADG) should be 1.2 kg (2.6 lbs.) or better. Targeting daily gains above 1.5 kg (3.3 lbs.) may require additional nutrient requirements.

Grain-fed veal cattle are fed a balanced ration based of grain (usually clean, whole-shelled corn) and pellets made of protein, vitamins, and minerals. A small amount of fibre should be offered daily to maintain rumen health. Cattle should also have continuous access to their feed, to encourage slower eating and stimulate chewing. Ensure there is adequate bunk space for each animal.

Calf starter

When calves are first introduced to solid feed it is referred to as “starter”. The form of the starter is personal preference, some have molasses added which calves love, but attracts a lot of flies. It can also clump in the summer with hot, humid weather, and freeze in the winter. Pellets are easier to feed but can be a challenge for young calves to get used to eating. The pellets can also crumble, making them unpalatable to the calf, so it is even more important to offer fresh calf starter daily.

The purpose of calf starter is to transition the calf from the milk-feeding period to the dry-feeding period. Calf starter is very important to healthy rumen development, good body growth, and successful weaning of the calf.

Calves should be offered small amounts of starter from day one in a shallow bucket to get the calves used to it. Start off with a handful and gradually increase that amount as the calf begins to consume all that is in the bucket. Calves will eat more if they can feel the bottom of the bucket. All buckets should be emptied and refreshed daily with clean feed. Keep calves on starter until they achieve 70 to 80 kg (155 to 175 lbs.) bodyweight, then gradually switch them to the corn and supplement over one to two weeks. When calves are consuming 1 kg (2 lbs.) of calf starter a day for three consecutive days, they can be fully weaned.

Calf starter must be palatable and nutritious. Do not use urea in starter feeds because the calf cannot digest it properly. The energy, protein, minerals, and vitamins must meet the requirements of Canada’s National Research Council (NRC). According to *Nutrient Requirements of Dairy Cattle*, specifications for dry matter starter feeds include:

- 20% crude protein
- 0.7% calcium
- 0.45% phosphorus
- 4,000 IU/kg Vitamin A
- 600 IU/kg Vitamin D
- 25 IU/kg Vitamin E

Feeding veal cattle

Depending on the management program, by the time cattle go to market, each calf will have consumed approximately 750 kg (1653 lbs.) of grain (mostly corn), 230 kg (507 lbs.) of supplement, 20 kg (41 lbs.) of roughage, 35 kg (77 lbs.) of milk replacer, and 25 kg (55 lbs.) of calf starter. Feed is the most expensive input into a veal business, but the cost of purchasing calves, veterinary bills, bedding, and overhead expenses will also add up. Be sure to include these costs in your business plan and use the COP tool to determine if your business will be profitable.

For more information:

As part of your research into starting a grain-fed veal farm, you are encouraged to talk to experienced veal producers, visit their farms (while following strict biosecurity protocols), and attend industry events and meetings. No two veal farms are the same and a lot of valuable information will be learned from each visit and event.

Find producer resources on the VFO website here: <https://bit.ly/VFOProdResources>

Find the *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Veal Cattle* here: <http://bit.ly/theVealCode>

Find OMAFRA veal resources here: <https://bit.ly/OMAFRAVealBusiness>

References available upon request.

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[@CalfCareCorner](https://twitter.com/CalfCareCorner)

Facebook: [@CalfCareCorner](https://facebook.com/CalfCareCorner)

[@Finishing grain-fed veal in Ontario](https://facebook.com/FinishingGrainFedVeal)

[@Marketing of male dairy calves in Ontario](https://facebook.com/MarketingOfMaleDairyCalves)

YouTube: [Calf Care Corner](https://youtube.com/CalfCareCorner)

[OntarioVeal](https://youtube.com/OntarioVeal)

Disclaimer: This resource is for educational purposes only. Veal Farmers of Ontario is not responsible for any business or management decisions made by consulting this resource.

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