

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) of age. 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.

Record-keeping

Keeping detailed records is an essential component of strong farm management, they form the basis for good decision-making. Records allow you to stay on top of production, feeding, and profitability. They also ensure you are meeting food safety and traceability requirements. When we think of farm business record-keeping, we often think of tracking and recording expenses, revenues, and other financial information. However, there is more data that Ontario grain-fed veal producers can be collecting, recording, and using to benefit their operations and help grow their businesses.

Keep in mind:

- Good record-keeping supports good decision-making
- Record-based decisions are only as good as the data used

Livestock production

All operations should have a visitors' log at the entry of the barn. In the event of a disease outbreak, trace in and out can be reviewed. This information could be invaluable. A downloadable visitors' log can be found at <https://bit.ly/RKVisitors>.

The easiest way for producers to begin keeping records is by tracking the movement of calves on the farm. Use the calves' ear tag numbers – either a management tag, or the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA) or DairyTrace tag – to identify each calf and information like:

- Source farm, auction, or dealer, recorded on the incoming record found at <https://bit.ly/RKIncoming>
- The barn or pen they are housed in
- Date and destination of when they leave the farm, recorded on the outgoing record found at <https://bit.ly/RKOutgoing>

Store all your records in a labelled binder with one divider (one side for tracing-in, one side for tracing out).

Animal health

The *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Veal Cattle* (the Code) and the *Verified Veal Program* are very clear on the requirements regarding animal health and antimicrobial usage.

The Code requires that **producers must have a valid, ongoing veterinary-client-patient relationship with a licensed veterinarian and at least one on-farm visit per year by the veterinarian to assess overall herd health and welfare, and treatments (preventative and therapeutic), health problems, and disease outbreaks must be recorded. The Code also requires that pharmaceuticals and vaccines must be used according to the label or veterinary prescription.**

To help producers, copies of these records are available at <https://bit.ly/RKHealthProducts>. The veal treatment and history record can be electronic or handwritten but should be readily accessible; a downloadable version can be found at <https://bit.ly/RKTreatmentHistory>. All records must be kept for two years. Before shipping any animals off the farm, check the records for the last time the animal was treated and what the meat withdrawal was.

Health and treatment records are important for disease prevention and detection, food safety, and consistency and continuity of treatment. Without records, producers tend to underestimate the incidence of disease on their farms. Research has also shown that producers who keep accurate and detailed health records achieve a lower incidence of disease. Health records can also be used to assess the health and welfare of individual animals and overall herd health status. For example, annual mortality is an important indicator of the general health of veal cattle. Mortality records are a Code requirement, and **mortalities (including reason for death or euthanasia, if known) must be recorded**. A template for can be found at <https://bit.ly/RKMortality>.

Feed

Not only is feed the highest input cost, but it is also a key component of finishing veal. As part of the *Verified Veal Program*, all incoming feed should be recorded, along with where it is stored. A feed sample should also be taken and stored for nine months after the date of sampling. In case of a feed event, there will be a detailed record of when the feed came in, the source, and if it was medicated. In addition, there is a medicated feed mixing record that is highly recommended to be filled out (if applicable). When mixing medicated feed on-farm, there should be a feed mixing protocol established. Copies of the applicable templates can be found here <https://bit.ly/RKIncomingFeed> and here <https://bit.ly/RKMedicatedFeed>.

Water

Water quality must be tested at least annually to ensure its suitability for cattle, and corrective action must be taken if an issue is identified. There is a water quality record available here <https://bit.ly/RKWater>, to keep track yearly of when the tests were completed, and any actions required. Writing this information down helps to monitor ongoing issues with water quality.

Pest control

Pest control is a requirement for all veal farms in Canada. Ongoing strategies to monitor and control pests and insects must be implemented. The pest control record keeps track of date, company responsible (if applicable), method of application and who is responsible. The simple act of writing this information down will help to keep the barn well-managed and prevent something like rodents from taking control. Find a template for the pest control record at <https://bit.ly/RKPestControl>.

Record-keeping may seem time-consuming, but in the event of an issue information will be needed, and these records become invaluable. Always keep the records stored in the same location and ensure that all staff and family members are aware of the record-keeping procedures. Records tell the story of your cattle and by ensuring records are kept up-to-date and accurate, you will gain a lot of insight into your farm. This will allow you to be prepared to make decisions quickly and accurately.

Remember you cannot manage what you do not measure!

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

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

Find Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs 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)

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