

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.

Balance

Raising calves for veal production is all about balance. Balancing the good and the bad bacteria, keeping the bad in check and encouraging growth of the good. Balancing the immune system of the calf and the disease challenge, keeping calves healthy with optimal performance.

This concept of balancing bacteria may seem simple but why is it so difficult? Keeping the scales in the favour of the calf can easily be tipped in the wrong direction by not keeping the feeding utensils and bedding clean.

The struggle of proper hygiene is real, and this is not the first time there has been a struggle with hygiene.

In 1847, Hungarian doctor Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis implemented a protocol of mandatory handwashing for doctors at the Vienna General Hospital to reduce the number of babies dying. Much to the surprise of many it worked, however people were still skeptical. Dr. Semmelweis went on to publish papers and a book about the importance of handwashing and still his peers would not accept that handwashing made a difference. It took until the 1980s for handwashing to be fully accepted as a method of stopping the spread of disease.

We can relate this back to the simple task of washing calf buckets and bottles in the calf nursery. For some, maybe they are not convinced it works. It is hard to accept things you cannot see, and bacteria are one of them. The simple task of washing feeding pails and bottles with hot water and a 10 per cent bleach solution can reduce many problems with calves. There have been many papers and books published on the topic, yet here we are in 2021 and many farms do not perform the simple task.

If time is the issue, will skipping washing the buckets and bottles really save you time? Not taking the time to wash them may seem like it is saving time but in the long run it is costing you time and money to care for the sick calves and lost production, affecting the bottom line.

In addition to washing the feeding tools, it is equally important to keep the bedding clean and dry. Keeping the bad bacteria low and not encourage growth. If in doubt whether the bedding is clean enough, try the kneel test. How clean are your knees?

All too often we forget calves are babies with a naïve immune system. It is our job to keep them alive and help them thrive. If we keep it simple, clean and disinfect the feeding utensils after each use and keep calves well-bedded and dry, we will be on the right track to healthy productive calves.

If you are looking to take cleanliness one step further, find helpful information for washing feeding utensils here: <https://bit.ly/cleaningutensils>

Conclusion

Work with what you have and make the best of it – keeping the balance really comes down to a few simple points clean and dry. There is a quote that summarizes this point, “One who maintains cleanliness, keeps away diseases.”

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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