

### 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.

### Veal cattle welfare

The *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Veal Cattle* (the Code) is the veal industry's standard of care. It is expected that all veal producers follow the Code requirements. As a veal producer it is your responsibility to know those requirements.

### Veal welfare assessment

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

Have you considered walking through your barn with a different set of eyes? Have you taken the time to assess welfare on your farm and ensure you are following the requirements of the Code? While most farms are already following the requirements, a welfare assessment can help you benchmark the level of welfare on your farm and identify your farm's strengths and areas that need work 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 an assessment booklet produced by Veal Farmers of Ontario. For an electronic copy click [here](#). If you prefer a printed copy, please contact the office.

### Animal care responsibility

As a producer you hire family or outside help to assist in the barn with the veal cattle. It is good practice to have everyone working in the barn sign an [Animal Care Code of Conduct](#). This customizable document explains that responsible farm animal care and handling among employees and service providers on the farm will be enforced, and that it applies to every person who handles or comes into contact with an animal. The document should be reviewed with new employees and signed, and then reviewed quarterly/annually thereafter. Everyone has a responsibility to ensure they treat animals humanely at all times, as well as report immediately any concerns about welfare.

This document 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.

## Conclusion

Assessing welfare may sound like an onerous task but it is something that is done subconsciously every time you enter the barn. Reviewing the veal cattle assessment booklet helps to formalize where your farm is at in regard to welfare. 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. Setting goals to improve is the best way to make those improvements. Have a plan, write it down with timelines and do what you can as you can afford to make major changes. Producers with a written plan for improvement are more likely to make change.

A focused assessment will help you take a bigger picture approach to the overall welfare of your herd to identify areas for improvement, track progress and keep staff (and yourself) accountable.

## 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/VFOProducerResources>

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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### Find us on social:

Twitter: [@OntarioVeal](https://twitter.com/OntarioVeal)

[@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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