

THE Connection

Spring 2025 Volume 7, No. 1



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IN THIS ISSUE

2025 AGM highlights

VFO welcomes investment in RMP

A new approach for respiratory problems



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Spring 2025 Volume 7, No. 1

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Contents

- 4** 2025 AGM highlights
- 6** VFO announces leadership for 2025
- 7** Unlocking calf health
- 8** VFO welcomes investment in RMP
- 10** “One cough is enough to start scanning”
- 12** Neonatal calf diarrhea: Understanding and treating a common threat
- 14** Embracing progress over perfection: A year-end review
- 16** What’s the big deal about fibre anyway?
- 18** Industry updates
- 20** Cultivating connections: Uniting Ontario communities through food and farming in 2024
- 22** When does gene editing make sense in livestock production?
- 24** Veal Market Information
- 25** Veal Trade Tracker
- 26** Featured veal recipe: Grilled Veal Rib Chops Florentine

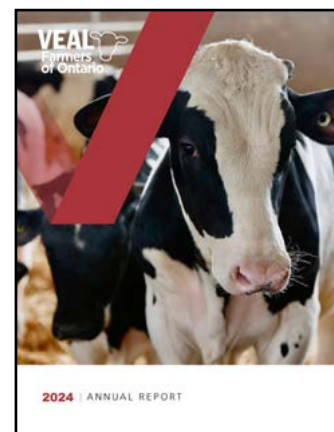


2025 AGM highlights



Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) was pleased to welcome attendees to our 2025 Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Producer Education Day on Wednesday, March 5, 2025, at The GrandWay Events Centre in Elora, Ontario. Industry leaders shared an overview of the projects, activities, and initiatives undertaken by VFO in 2024, including highlights from our flagship consumer marketing and producer education programs.

Thank you to our members, industry partners, and sponsors for joining us to celebrate our 10th anniversary as a marketing board and 35 years of dedicated service to the Ontario veal sector!



Learn more about VFO's 2024 initiatives in our Annual Report, available online at: vealfarmers.ca.



Annual VFO Board of Director's Award winner announced

Recognizing dedication and service to the veal cattle industry



The VFO Board of Director's Award recognizes the contributions that many make to help the VFO Board achieve its mandate of supporting a viable livestock sector in Ontario and providing proactive and engaged leadership for Ontario dairy calf and veal cattle farmers. This year, Cara Ferguson from Edana Integrated Marketing was recognized for her commitment and dedication to promoting Ontario veal to consumers.

Over the years, Ferguson has worked closely with VFO to develop and implement consumer marketing strategies and promotions, including the popular Ontario's Best Veal Sandwich (OBVS) contest. Behind the scenes, she also ensures consumer-focused social media platforms are fresh and responsive to trends and that the ontariovealappeal.ca website is full of tantalizing Ontario veal recipes and photos.

"Experiencing this year's OBVS finale firsthand really showed me the impact of the program," says Philip Kroesbergen, VFO Chair. "It was really encouraging to see the level of energy and excitement at this event and how much people enjoy Ontario veal and appreciate the farmers that produce it for them. We thank Cara for her work on our suite of consumer marketing programs and for her support of Ontario's veal farmers." ■



Producer Education Day

Dr. Gabriel Jantzi from Metzger Veterinary Services shared his observations from calf herds throughout Ontario and discussed practical vaccination strategies to improve veal cattle health.



Jennifer Haley, VFO Executive Director, moderated the veal industry 'hot stove' open discussion. This interactive session was designed to gather producer perspectives on challenges and opportunities facing our sector and will help shape future VFO policy recommendations. ■

VFO announces leadership for 2025

Re-election of Kroesbergen as Chair, Yantzi, Vice Chair



Philip Kroesbergen, Chair



Dylan Yantzi, Vice Chair

Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) is pleased to announce the re-election of Middlesex County veal producer Philip Kroesbergen as Chair and Dylan Yantzi as Vice Chair, at a recent meeting of the Board of Directors.

Kroesbergen, who joined the VFO Board in 2017, farms full-time with his father and brother near Strathroy. Their family operation, Creekside Acres, has been raising veal cattle exclusively for over 30 years. Kroesbergen previously served as Vice Chair in 2020, returning to the Executive in the fall of 2022.

“Continued collaborations with our industry partners and colleagues will be a focus for the organization in the coming year as we work together on key issues impacting the Ontario agri-food sector,” says Kroesbergen.

Yantzi, who was appointed to the VFO Board in 2021, raises veal cattle near Tavistock with his family. He has served as Vice Chair since 2023.

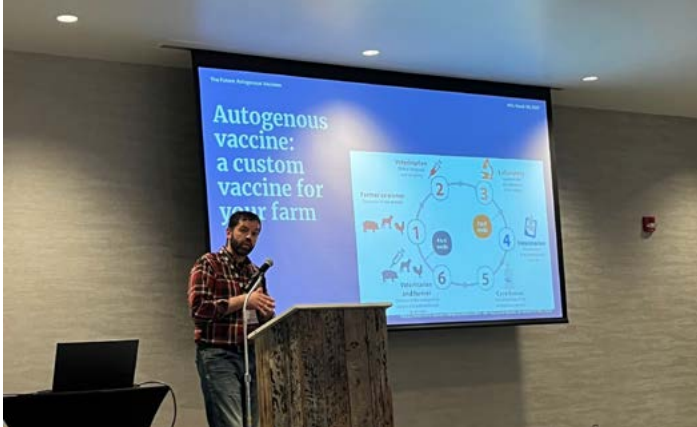
Aaron Keunen (Palmerston), Kyle Roes (Millbank), and Cory Streicher (Newton) were acclaimed to the VFO Board at the 2025 Annual General Meeting held on March 5 in Elora, Ontario and will serve three-year terms.

Also returning to the eight member VFO Board of Directors are Judy Dirksen (Harriston), Kurtis Moesker (Stratford), and Tom Oudshoorn (Auburn).

“I would like to thank our Board of Directors for their leadership and service,” says Kroesbergen. “We remain committed to driving excellence in Ontario’s dairy calf and veal cattle industry, ensuring its growth and success for years to come.” ■

Unlocking calf health

Proven vaccination strategies



In early March, Dr. Gabriel Jantzi from Metzger Veterinary Services spoke to producers at the Veal Farmers of Ontario Annual General Meeting and Producer Education Day about vaccination strategies to improve veal cattle health and performance.

Alongside scenarios he’s currently seeing on-farm, Jantzi began his presentation describing the different types of vaccines producers could consider. Vaccines help the calf’s immune system build antibodies against invading pathogens so when a calf does encounter a specific virus or bacteria their immune system can recognize it and know how to fight it off.

Modified live vaccines (MLV) are powerful, and most producers raising veal cattle only need one dose given the timeline animals are kept on-farm. Killed vaccines are less expensive, but not as powerful when given to calves. They need a primer and booster two to four weeks later.

Immunity products are usually given orally at birth – Jantzi acknowledged that veal producers traditionally don’t have that ‘window of opportunity’ to work with but suggested calves receiving high quality colostrum from vaccinated cows, pastes, and/or boluses could be topics of conversation with dairy farmers that calves are purchased directly from.

“Nothing takes the place of good colostrum,” said Jantzi, adding that veal producers can also find nutritional approaches to help calves boost their responses to different diseases.

Intranasal products are easier on calves and don’t overwhelm their bodies – they take two to three days to kick in, unlike 10 to 14 days with injectable products, but with the caveat that the protection doesn’t last as long.

In Jantzi’s experience, the local immunity lasts from 60 to up to 80 days. This vaccine type also doesn’t cover as many diseases but protects against those like infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) at a low cost per dose. “It’s a good return on investment for current intranasal vaccines,” he said.

Clostridial vaccines are also gaining traction because they protect calves against complications from castration, like tetanus. Veal cattle are not castrated, but for producers starting calves for the dairy-beef sector, this is an important step.

According to Jantzi, there are a few main groups to target when developing a vaccination program. The first one is the scours group, which in-

cludes E. coli, several Salmonella subtypes, cryptosporidium, rotavirus, coronavirus, and coccidiosis.

Jantzi encouraged producers to guard against widespread coccidiosis seen on-farm in Ontario with feed additives and added a reminder that rotaviruses and coronaviruses are all about hygiene.

“With scours, we just have a reality check,” he said. “It happens right away, much more quickly than any vaccine we give the calf could work.” Jantzi recommends going back to the basics – improving cleanliness and using more straw when bedding, reducing stress, and offering good quality nutrition.

In his practice, Jantzi sees pneumonia as the bigger threat to calf health. The top concerns in Ontario are bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV) and IBR as underlying viral infections, while bacterial pneumonias include *Mannhaemia haemolytica*, *Pasturella multocida*, *Histophilus somni*, and *Mycoplasma bovis*.

Using a soccer analogy, Jantzi explained that viruses are usually the first problem and will kick out the goalkeeper, but it’s the bacteria that score the goal. Giving an example, viruses enter barns in November and producers see up to 60 per cent of calves sick with BRSV, which kicks out the goalkeeper – the calves don’t die, but the virus makes them just sick enough that a bacteria can come in as a secondary infection and score the goal (causing mortality).

“Don’t throw out the power of the intranasal vaccines,” he said, suggesting that producers could harness their effectiveness and give them right away to help keep the goalkeepers in place. In his experience, they do a great job at protecting against IBR and are 60 to 70 per cent effective against BRSV. They can also boost the calf’s immune system so it’s stronger in other areas to fight disease.

“If you surround a calf with enough disease, it will get sick,” reminded Jantzi, explaining that while there have not been a lot of new vaccines in recent years, we do have new diseases, more health challenges, and bigger herds.

Vaccines are just a tool. No single tool will solve all our problems, but when combined with other effective strategies that begin at birth, producers can take steps to improve the health and performance of their herds. Work with your herd veterinarian to develop a targeted vaccination program for your farm. ■

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VFO welcomes investment in Risk Management Program



Jennifer Haley
Executive Director



Patrick MacCarthy
Policy Advisor

In a significant move to bolster Ontario's agricultural sector, the provincial government has announced a \$100 million investment in the Risk Management Program (RMP) over the next three years. Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) Chair Philip Kroesbergen and Past Chair Pascal Bouilly, along with other members of the Ontario Agriculture Sustainability Coalition (OASC), were pleased to join Agriculture, Food, and Agribusiness Minister Rob Flack and Minister of Finance Peter Bethlenfalvy for this important announcement.

As a member of OASC, VFO has worked tirelessly over the past number of years to advocate for increased support to Ontario's RMP program, the largest and most important business risk management program available

to veal producers. VFO is grateful for the support of Premier Ford and Minister Flack in listening to Ontario's veal farmers and investing in the growth and sustainability of Ontario's agriculture sector with the additional funding to the RMP program.

This historic investment in the Ontario livestock industry and specifically the veal sector will ensure that Ontario's veal farmers have the tools required to successfully navigate the dynamic and unpredictable market conditions they are currently facing and remain focused on producing high quality protein for Ontario consumers. With the economic uncertainty of the markets looking forward and rising costs of production, veal farmers depend on the RMP program as the central part of their business risk management strategy.

The \$100 million increase will be phased in over a three-year period, starting with a \$30 million increase for the 2025 program year, leading to an annual total of \$250 million by the 2027 program year. Producer premiums will remain at 35 per cent of government funding.



VFO Chair Philip Kroesbergen and Minister Rob Flack.



Parliamentary Assistant John Jordan, VFO Past Chair Pascal Bouilly, Minister Rob Flack, VFO Executive Director Jennifer Haley.



VFO Past Chair Pascal Bouilly, Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy, VFO Executive Director Jennifer Haley.

Ontario's RMP program helps producers manage risks beyond their control. The Veal RMP program was designed in consultation with representatives of the veal industry in Ontario. RMP for the veal sector works like insurance to help Ontario producers offset losses caused by fluctuating commodity prices and production costs. Participants pay premiums based on their insured production and their chosen coverage level.

Given the enhanced support and resources now available through the RMP program, it is crucial for producers to enroll in the program. Participation not only offers financial protection against unforeseen challenges but also contributes to the overall stability and resilience of Ontario's agri-food sector. By enrolling, producers can better manage risks, invest in innovation, and explore new market opportunities, ensuring the long-term viability of their operations.

The RMP program is administered by Agricorp, Ontario's farm business risk management agency. Producers interested in enrolling can visit Agricorp's website at <https://www.agricorp.com/en-ca/Programs/RMP/Veal/Pages/Overview.aspx> for detailed information on program dates, eligibility criteria, and application procedures. ■



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“One cough is enough to start scanning”

A new approach to reducing antimicrobial use for respiratory problems

Lilian Schaer, Agricultural Writer
for Veal Farmers of Ontario



Preconditioning and new ways of thinking around early disease detection on-farm could be a gamechanger for reducing antimicrobial use in veal production. That's according to Dr. Bart Pardon, a professor at Belgium's Ghent University, who shared his research into the topic with a full house at the 2024 Healthy Calf Conference.

Farmers around the world are facing pressure to reduce the use of antimicrobials in livestock production. That pressure is particularly strong in Europe – but Pardon believes that while this is a short-term challenge for the industry, it will ultimately give way to more sustainable production.

“The prevailing thought in Europe now is that industries that are unable to live without mass medication need to be rethought or abandoned and the veal industry is one that is in the scope of the (European Union) authorities,” he said. “There is no need to panic, however, because there is so much knowledge that we can use that we currently don't do.”

In the EU, he noted, the veal calf industry is still the biggest livestock user of antimicrobials, despite already making significant strides towards reduction. This was simpler in the beginning when the industry first began cutting back on overuse; now, additional reductions have become harder to realize.

“It was easy to reduce because we were overusing out of habit; now we have to find ways we can abandon group treatment (altogether),” he said, adding that 60 to 70 per cent of the veal industry's antimicrobial use is linked to respiratory disease.

The Scientific Opinion on Welfare of Calves, commissioned by the European Commission as part of its Farm to Fork Strategy, will be integrated into law and will mean changes – and challenges – to how calves are raised.

Calves will need to be housed in groups of no more than 10 animals after spending at least 24 hours nursing their mothers, for example, with good colostrum management and higher levels of milk feeding. As well, the minimum age for transport will increase from a minimum of 14 days to 28 days.

By comparison, calves in Canada eight days of age and younger under may only be transported once and cannot be shipped to assembly yards or sales barns.

Preconditioning

One tool is preconditioning calves to ensure they are fit for transport, which includes good body weight, sufficient colostrum intake, and vaccination. As well, calves should be clinically healthy with no pneumonia showing on the ultrasound and a *Mycoplasma bovis* (M. bovis) negative status.

The industry already knows so much about which calves do well, Pardon said, it's just a matter of doing more to apply that knowledge into practice.

Calves with low body weights, for example, have no spare energy to fight infections, which are exacerbated by the stress of transport. Failure of passive immunity transfer from the dam also increase a calf's risk of getting sick.

Upon arrival after transport from their farm of origin, about five per cent of calves arrive with clinical signs of M. bovis. Others don't yet show signs of the disease, but could also be ill, and these animals will have higher odds of developing chronic pneumonia, as well as weighing an average of eight to nine kilograms less at harvest.

Early disease detection

That's where lung ultrasonography is a game-changer on the farm, noted Pardon. It takes only one to two minutes per calf and is the most reliable way to detect pneumonia before a calf displays clinical signs of disease.

“Early detection and short therapy are better cures, but you have to find

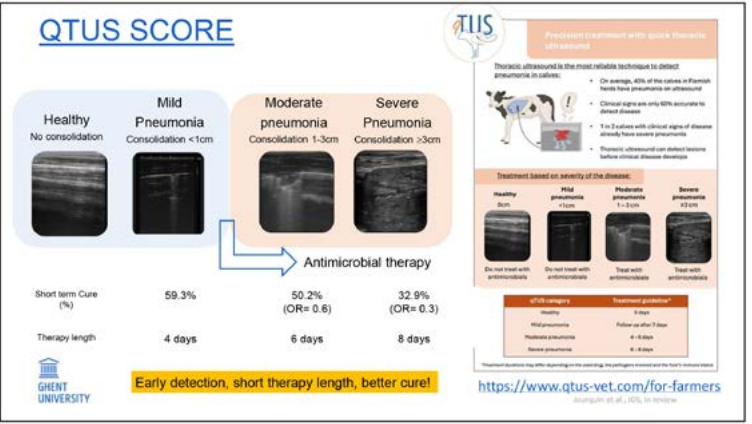


FIT FOR TRANSPORT!



Photo credit: Dr. Bart Pardon

- 1. Good body weight
- 2. Sufficient colostrum uptake
- 3. Vaccinated
- 4. Clinically healthy
- 5. No pneumonia on ultrasound
- 6. M. bovis negative farms



calves in the subclinical phase before they start to show visible signs of disease,” he says. “That’s where the lung ultrasound is a golden opportunity. It requires training and dedication but it’s a great tool that can help move the industry forward.”

According to Pardon, about 40 per cent of calves in the European beef and dairy industries have lung consolidation to some degree. If lung consolidation is more than one centimetre, the calf should be treated with an antimicrobial, which will lead to lung re-aeration.

Pardon's work has shown that sick calves diagnosed with quick thoracic ultrasound (qTUS) and subsequently treated and cured performed the same as healthy calves who never got sick. qTUS scores show that 60 per cent of mild cases self-cure, whereas only 30 to 40 per cent of severe cases generally get better on their own.

“We can fully cure calves if we do it right and that’s an eye opener,” he said.

Short therapy

There is still the need, however, to find strategies to reduce the volume of antimicrobials used and to move away from group treatment.

That's where Pardon's work in adjusting therapy length for each calf individually based on its lung scan or qTUS score rather than treating an entire group of animals is showing remarkable results.

In calves where antimicrobial treatment was stopped after a single injection, 70 to 80 per cent of calves went on to be cured; 95 per cent were cured after a seven-day course of treatment. Overall, qTUS-guided individual treatment showed it is possible to reduce 50 to 65 per cent of antimicrobial use compared to group treatment.

“A calf with mild pneumonia should be cured in four days, moderate pneumonia in six days and severe in eight days although odds for a cure are low in severe cases,” Pardon said, adding that the calves with one centimetre lung consolidation are the ones that can best be helped with this technology.

“One cough is enough to start scanning, that’s your early warning; you can scan them all or do a lung ultrasound on just that one calf,” he said.

Using lung ultrasound does require training so users can take correct

measurements, but Pardon believes it's a great tool with the capacity to change the future of the industry as it allows farmers and vets to definitively state if an animal is healthy or not.

As well, qTUS-guided therapy is opening up news ways for farmers to use antimicrobials by moving away from population-based medicine and instead embracing precision medicine.

“Early detection and short therapy result in a better cure, and by using qTUS and fit for transport criteria, we can make a more sustainable industry,” he believes. ■

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Neonatal calf diarrhea: Understanding and treating a common threat

Dr. Luiza Stachewski Zakia, Assistant Professor
University of Guelph

Neonatal calf diarrhea (NCD) is a persistent challenge for dairy producers and calf raisers worldwide. It is one of the most common health issues in young calves, particularly during their first few weeks of life. Diarrhea not only reduces the growth potential of calves but also increases the risk of death, making it a significant concern for both animal welfare and farm profitability.

Effective management of NCD requires understanding its clinical signs, identifying which calves are at risk for severe illness, and deciding when to use treatments like oral electrolytes, antimicrobial drugs (AMD), and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Calves with NCD often experience dehydration, but not all cases are equally severe. A subset of diarrheic calves may develop bacteremia, a condition where bacteria enter the bloodstream, leading to systemic infection. In a recent study from the University of Guelph, 37 per cent of calves with diarrhea were found to be bacteremic. Identifying bacteremic calves is critical, as they require immediate and targeted treatment to prevent severe outcomes.

Recognizing systemic illness and bacteremia

To identify calves with bacteremia, key indicators include scleral injection (redness in the whites of the eyes – Figure 1), sunken eyes despite the calf receiving oral fluids, and an inability to stand. An absent suckle reflex, combined with an increased rectal temperature, also strongly suggests systemic illness. These observable signs allow producers to quickly assess which calves are most at risk and prioritize their care.

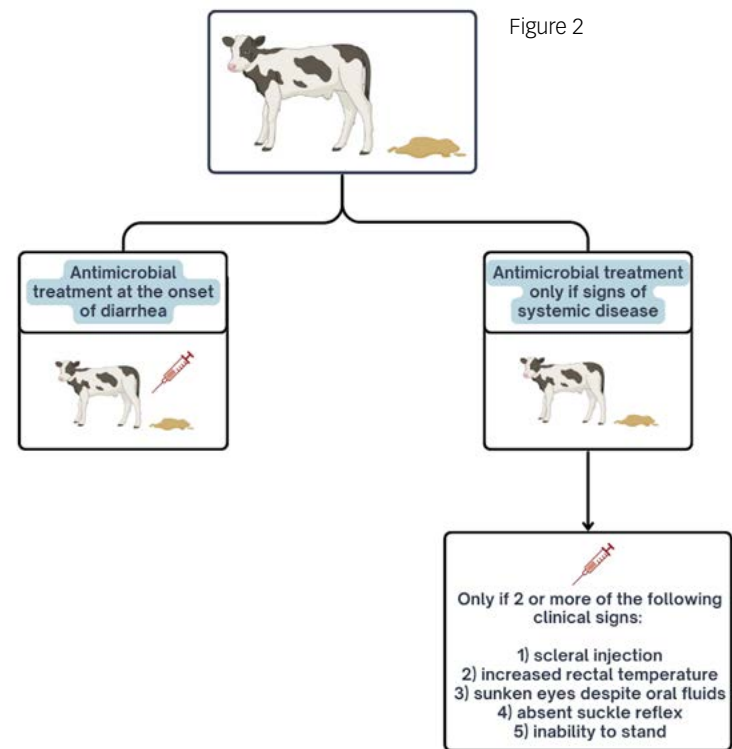


Figure 1

Laboratory findings can further support clinical observations. The same study showed that bacteremic calves often had lower blood pH (acidosis) and elevated inflammatory markers. While these tests may not be practical for everyday use on farms, they highlight the physiological changes underlying severe diarrhea and reinforce the importance of clinical vigilance.

Timing antimicrobial treatment: Key findings from a randomized trial

One of the most debated aspects of NCD management is when to start AMD treatment. A recent randomized trial conducted by a research group at the University of Guelph compared two approaches: treating calves with AMD at the onset of diarrhea versus only treating if they presented systemic signs of disease, such as scleral injection, increased rectal temperature, dehydration despite oral fluids, absent suckle reflex or inability to stand (Figure 2).



Calves treated with AMD at the first sign of diarrhea did not experience shorter diarrhea duration or improved average daily gain compared to those treated later. Moreover, these calves faced higher risks of mortality. Premature treatment may interfere with the calf's natural ability to recover, potentially weakening its overall health. On the other hand, delaying treatment until systemic signs proved more effective. This approach ensures that only calves in genuine need receive AMD, reducing unnecessary drug use and helping to combat antimicrobial resistance.

Practical recommendations for producers

- 1) **Monitor closely for clinical signs of systemic illness:** Producers should regularly observe calves for signs such as scleral injection, sunken eyes, absent suckle reflex, and increased rectal temperature. These signs indicate the need for immediate veterinary attention.
- 2) **Prioritize hydration and supportive care:** For calves with diarrhea but no systemic signs of bacteremia, rehydration and nutritional support should be the first line of treatment. Ensuring the calf maintains hydration and energy levels is often enough for recovery. NSAIDs can also be beneficial in reducing inflammation and improving the calf's comfort.

- 3) **Use antimicrobial drugs selectively:** Not all diarrheic calves require AMD. Reserving AMD for those showing systemic signs reduces the risk of resistance while ensuring effective treatment for calves in need.
- 4) **Collaborate with your veterinarian:** Developing a tailored treatment protocol with a veterinarian can help producers make informed decisions about when and how to intervene.

Take home messages

Managing NCD effectively requires balancing prompt action with careful judgment. The decision to treat calves with AMD should not be taken lightly, as unnecessary use can have long-term consequences for both animal health and farm sustainability. By focusing on clinical signs and targeted treatments, producers can improve the health and survival of their calves while reducing costs and safeguarding the efficacy of AMD. The studies reviewed here highlight the importance of a practical, evidence-based approach to NCD management. With these tools, producers can navigate the challenges of calf diarrhea more effectively, ensuring healthier animals and a more productive operation. ■

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Embracing progress over perfection: A year-end review



Kendra Keels
Industry Development Director



As the year begins, it is time to reflect on the past 12 months and assess your farm's performance. It can be easy to fall into the trap of comparing our farms to those of our neighbour. However, this year-end review encourages you to embrace progress over perfection by focusing on your farm's unique journey and improvements year-over-year.

Reflecting on achievements and challenges

Start your review by acknowledging your farm's achievements. Celebrate the successes, no matter how small. Did you increase production, reduce mortality, and/or improve housing? Perhaps you implemented a new feeding system or simply started recordkeeping. Take note of these wins, as they serve as milestones of your progress.

Equally important is recognizing the challenges you faced, like weather conditions, market fluctuations, and calf health challenges. Reflecting on these obstacles will help you understand how you navigated through them and which strategies worked best. Remember, every challenge is an opportunity to gain experience and grow.

Setting goals based on your progress

Rather than striving for perfection, set realistic and attainable goals for the coming year. These goals should be based on your farm's performance over the past year and the areas you identified for improvement. Here are some key areas to consider when setting your goals:

1. Productivity and efficiency

Aim to enhance productivity by investing in technologies or practices that can boost efficiency. For instance, consider calf housing – is it clean, dry and well-ventilated? Is it meeting the housing requirement in the *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Veal Cattle*? If not, evaluate your current housing system and identify areas where adjustments can lead to significant improvements. Remember, progress over perfection.

2. Sustainability

Implementing effective health management practices and protocols, such as vaccination programs and prompt treatment of illnesses, helps reduce disease incidence and improve calf survival rates.

3. Financial management

Financial stability is crucial for the success of any farm. Set goals to improve your economic management practices. This could include budgeting more effectively, reducing debt, or implementing an inventory management system to keep track of inventory levels, including feed, supplies, and livestock. Efficient inventory management can reduce waste and prevent overstocking. Regularly reviewing your financial performance will help you make informed decisions and plan for the future.

4. Community and networking

Farming can sometimes feel isolating, but connecting with other producers and agricultural organizations can provide valuable support and insights. Set a goal to engage more with your local farming community. Attend workshops, join agricultural forums, and share experiences with fellow producers. Collaboration can lead to innovative solutions and shared success.

Embracing the journey

It is essential to remember that every farm is unique, and comparing yourself to others can be counterproductive. Your farm's progress should be measured against your own past performance, not against the benchmarks set by others. Focus on the improvements you have made and the goals you have achieved. Celebrate the journey and the effort you have put in to make your farm better year after year.

Conclusion

As you conduct your year-end review, keep in mind that farming is a continuous learning process. Embrace progress over perfection and set goals that are tailored to your farm's needs and potential. By doing so, you will be better equipped to face the challenges of the coming year with confidence and resilience. ■



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What's the big deal about fibre anyway?



Chad Mader, Beef Cattle Specialist
 Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness

You don't have to look through many previous editions of this magazine to find articles on the value of including some amount of fibrous feeds (forage) in veal rations. Some articles have discussed the role that fibre plays in maintaining rumen health. Others have looked at appropriate levels of forage in the ration, or the ideal chop length of that forage. Some articles have shared producer experiences incorporating different forage sources – hay vs. straw, for example – and what has worked best for their specific operations. Perhaps the only article I could not find was one highlighting a reason NOT to feed forage. And yet, it appears that there is still a significant portion of the veal industry that is not including sufficient forage in their diets. So, why is that?

If you are not feeding sufficient forage, I would encourage you to think about why you are not. Do you feel like your current system is working? Do you bed with straw, and feel like your veal cattle eat enough of that to act as their forage source? Or is it just what you have always done?

The advantages of including forage can be considered under three main categories: welfare, health, and performance. From a welfare perspective, including forage can help to reduce undesirable behaviours such as chewing on gates, feeders, and calves suckling on pen mates. It has also been shown to reduce abnormal behaviours such as tongue-rolling, which is thought to be associated with stress. The current *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Veal Cattle* recommends the use of fibrous feeds. Finally, fibre promotes more cud-chewing, which also helps to reduce stress.

In terms of animal health, the major risk for cattle on high-grain diets is acidosis. Rapid fermentation of starch causes a drop in rumen pH, making the rumen too acidic for bacteria. Severe cases will cause animals to go off-feed, appear dull, lethargic, and obviously unwell. The less severe – but more common – scenario is what is referred to as subclinical acidosis. In this case, the rumen is more acidic than it should be, but not so acidic that it causes the obvious symptoms described above.

This concept is probably not new to most readers, but subclinical acidosis has long been linked to an increase in liver abscesses and poor foot health. In addition, there is evidence that it is associated with increased risk of polio, pneumonia, as well as pyelonephritis (kidney infection), and endocarditis (heart infection). While there are several factors involved, the key message is that adequate forage levels in the ration promote rumen health, and healthy rumens are critical for healthy cattle.

From an animal performance and economic perspective, a lot of the ben-

efits outlined above also translate into increased profitability. The welfare advantages of including forage in the ration are a result of reducing stress. While there may not be a measurable correlation between tongue-rolling and weight gain, there is substantial evidence that less-stressed animals gain more weight, are more efficient, have improved meat quality, and fewer health issues. In addition to improved overall health, a healthy rumen promotes better feed intake, improved feed efficiency, and therefore increased weight gain.

Finally, the potential foot issues and organ infections associated with poor rumen health will have a negative impact on animal performance. The treatment cost required to address these health impacts (for example, laminitis, pneumonia) should be considered. Finally, affected organs at harvest represent an economic loss when organs are condemned – abscessed livers would be the best example. In addition, multiple abnormal organs can also increase the risk of the entire carcass being condemned.

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Based on all this information, if you aren't currently using forage in your veal ration, I would suggest you try it. If you are already doing so, don't be afraid to consider ways to improve. If you are concerned that adding forage may reduce weight gain, I would remind you that maximum weight gain is not always the path to maximum profit. Ration changes will also impact feed efficiency and feed cost. There are costs associated with veterinary treatment and potential condemnation losses at harvest.

I would also suggest that bedding with straw is not an effective way to add forage to the ration. The intake of straw bedding is likely less consistent, and harder to monitor than if the forage is in the feed bunk. There is also the question of how clean the straw is, coming from the bedding pack. We all know that veal cattle are going to eat some straw bedding, but if it is the only forage source, that encourages veal cattle to eat as much of that (potentially dirty) straw as they can. Finally, if you try feeding forage and you aren't happy with the results, try something different. There are lots of success stories, so just because it doesn't work for you the first time doesn't mean you should give up! The current market can mean mistakes are that much more costly but also makes any improvements much more rewarding. ■

Chad would be happy to hear producers' stories of successes or challenges with feeding forage to veal cattle. He can be reached at chad.mader@ontario.ca.

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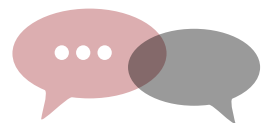
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INDUSTRY UPDATES



VFO attends DFO and BFO AGMs

Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) was pleased to join Dairy Farmers of Ontario (DFO) at their 60th Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Toronto in mid-January. It was a great opportunity to connect with dairy producers, discuss industry issues with our colleagues and partners, and promote our calf care resources. VFO appreciates our long-standing partnership with DFO; this year Ontario veal sliders were featured as part of the lunch menu.

VFO was also pleased to join Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) at their AGM in late February. We appreciated the opportunity to interact with our beef industry colleagues and hear more about challenges impacting the livestock sector. Delegates to the BFO AGM approved an increase to the beef check-off, as well as an increase to the national check-off portion.



VFO advocates for increase to interest-free portion of APP

In February, VFO signed a joint letter, along with Ontario's major commodity and general farm organizations, urging Minister LeBlanc and Minister MacAulay to immediately consider increasing the interest-free portion under the Advance Payments Program (APP) prior to the start of the next program year, which begins in April.

APP is a critical tool for farmers, particularly new entrants and young farmers, that helps farm operations manage cash flow demands amid rising market volatility and high debt servicing costs.

VFO welcomes the recent news that the interest-free portion of the APP was maintained at \$250,000 for the 2025/26 program year.

VFO celebrates Canada's Agriculture Day

VFO celebrated Canada's Agriculture Day on February 11, using social media to thank each member of the agri-food supply chain that works hard to ensure Canadian plates remain full of local, nutritious food, and share "Life of a veal farm family", part of the suite of videos we partnered with Farm & Food Care Ontario to create.

VFO attends South Western Ontario Dairy Symposium

VFO attended the South Western Ontario Dairy Symposium (SWODS) in Woodstock in late February, connecting with members, discussing industry issues, promoting calf care, and distributing resources. Attendance at events alongside our industry partners continues to show our commitment to the dairy calf and veal cattle sectors.

Ontario veal on a bun was featured as part of the Food From our Farms lunch to acknowledge the partnership between dairy and veal producers. Thank you to SWODS organizers and Highland Meat Packers for your support!



Dr. Ken Leslie to be inducted into the OAHF

Dr. Ken Leslie, Professor Emeritus at the University of Guelph, will be inducted into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame (OAHF) in 2025 for his significant contributions to Ontario agriculture.

VFO was pleased to offer a letter of support for Dr. Leslie's nomination, in

recognition of his contributions to dairy calf research over his career. Dr. Leslie was a great partner for VFO and the legacy Ontario Veal Association and collaborated with us on a number of important calf health projects. His research, genuine interest in helping farmers, and areas of focus were instrumental in our strategic direction of improving calf health.

Veal industry leader honoured with King Charles III Coronation Medal

Congratulations to Jennifer Haley, Executive Director of Veal Farmers of Ontario, for receiving the King Charles III Coronation Medal. Nominated by her family, Haley was recognized for her leadership and contributions to the agriculture sector and her long-time volunteer service within her local community.

Haley was honoured with the award by Brantford-Brant Member of Parliament Larry Brock in a late February ceremony.



"Jen Haley's dedication and commitment to every single thing she takes on is well-known in the agricultural world, in her hometown where she is an avid volunteer, and within her family connections," said Judy Dirksen, VFO Director. "It has been a pleasure to work with Jen for nearly 25 years. She has always shown herself to be honest, loyal, and diligent in her work to make sure the veal commodity voice is not only heard, but respected with a seat at the table. I count it a privilege to call Jen a friend and congratulate her on receiving this well-deserved award!"

Marking the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III, the Coronation Medal recognizes 30,000 deserving individuals who have made meaningful contributions to their local community, province, and Canada.

VFO welcomes new Minister of Agriculture

VFO extends congratulations and welcomes Trevor Jones to his new role as Minister of Agriculture Food, and Agri-Business. We look forward to working with him again on the many important issues impacting the livestock sector. Minister Jones had previously served as Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Agriculture in 2022, where VFO was able to connect with him on a number of important files.

VFO thanks Minister Flack

VFO would like to thank outgoing Minister Rob Flack, who will now serve

as Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, for his dedication to working with Ontario's farmers, and bringing forward an investment of \$100 million into Ontario's Risk Management Program. VFO appreciates the working relationship Minister Flack cultivated with each of the commodity groups and we wish him all the best in his new role.

Quebec licence fee increase

VFO has recently been advised by the Canadian Beef Check-Off Agency that as of **April 1, 2025**, the check-off payable by Quebec sellers has been updated by the Producteurs de bovins du Québec. As such, purchasers and dealers in Ontario are now required to deduct and remit amended levies on finished veal cattle as well as bob calves sold by Quebec sellers in Ontario.

Find updated copies of the Form 4, along with more information, at <https://vealfarmers.ca/about-us/licence-fees/>.

Join VFO's private Facebook groups

VFO has two private Facebook groups to help foster connections between members, share timely sector updates, and provide a space for discussing producer and industry issues.

The *Marketing of male dairy calves in Ontario* group is designed for dairy and veal producers, and for those starting calves for the dairy-beef market. The *Finishing grain-fed veal in Ontario* group is geared towards producers finishing male dairy cattle for veal markets.

To join, send a request! Both are great forums to ask questions and start important conversations. ■

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Cultivating connections: Uniting Ontario communities through food and farming in 2024

Farm & Food Care Ontario year in review



Jessica McCann, Communications Coordinator
Farm & Food Care Ontario



Kyle Roes was featured as a part of the Faces Behind Food project. One of the veal photos newly available through Farmphotos.ca.

Thanks to the continued support of partners like Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO), 2024 was another successful year for Farm & Food Care Ontario (FFCO). Through collaboration with VFO and other industry partners, FFCO facilitated numerous opportunities for farmers, agribusinesses, and the public to engage, building confidence in Ontario farms and food systems. These initiatives brought farming and non-farming communities together, creating spaces for consumers to meet and interact directly with Ontario's farmers and food producers.

In 2024, FFCO and VFO partnered on initiatives designed to spark conversations and address consumer questions about veal farming in Ontario.

Breakfast on the Farm

FFCO hosted three Breakfast on the Farm (BOTF) events across the province in 2024, attracting over 24,800 guests. The first event took place in partnership with the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival, where FFCO organized a Farm Discovery Zone. Additional events were held at farms in Ottawa and Perth County. These events featured livestock displays, equipment showcases, and educational exhibits, with all-Ontario breakfasts served by volunteers. On two occasions, our committee had to close volunteer sign-ups due to the high demand.

FFCO partnered with VFO at all three events to distribute veal brochures, information sheets, and culinary guides. As one attendee shared, "I am not from a farming community and have only lived in cities. The event was fun. It was also educational. It was such a good reminder of the importance of the farming community in Canada and it put a human face on it."

Farm tours

2024 also marked a significant milestone for FFCO's farm tour program, celebrating its 100th tour. Since 2004, FFCO has featured 258 farms and food processing facilities. This year, FFCO focused on modifying the pro-

gram to reach new audiences, launching food industry professional tours and hosting four culinary student tours.

Events and outreach

FFCO also participated in several key events in 2024, further extending the reach of its programs. In August, FFCO, alongside members, spent 18 days at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE), showcasing a theatre-style FarmFood360 kiosk. The interactive exhibit allowed visitors to experience real Ontario farms through virtual reality. The exhibit attracted 7,470 visitors, and the same experience was offered at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair (RAWF), engaging an additional 1,800 attendees.

In September FFCO was pleased to attend the Ontario's Best Veal Sandwich contest finale. Additionally, FFCO had the privilege of hosting Dr. Temple Grandin, who shared insights into animal welfare and behavior with a capacity crowd of industry professionals and FFCO members.

Digital outreach

In addition to in-person events, digital outreach is vital to FFCO's work. Through Faces Behind Food on Instagram and Facebook, FFCO shared the stories of 103 individuals from across agriculture. FFCO answered 40 Ask a Farmer questions reaching 2.5 million Canadians. Two veal farmers were featured in Faces Behind Food in 2024.

Farm & Food Care groups in Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Prince Edward Island continued adding to the expansive photo library at FarmPhotos.ca. A new veal section was added in 2024, showcasing modern veal farming. The library is free for non-commercial use, with thousands of images available for download.

Training and workshops

FFCO facilitated livestock emergency response workshops in Newcastle, Cochrane, Lambton, and Clinton. These workshops, attended by 151

first responders, covered livestock trailer designs, safe animal extrication, and regulations on animal transportation, handling, and care. FFCO also delivered 26 sessions on agricultural media training, Speak Up training, and boothmanship to industry professionals.

FFCO and VFO prioritized collaboration in 2024. Our teams worked closely together to address challenges and identify opportunities. FFCO appreciates VFO's commitment and is proud to partner with them to build confidence in Ontario's farming and food systems.

Opportunities for engagement

FFCO remains committed to fostering opportunities for members to connect. This year, FFCO hosted quarterly #OntAg communicators calls, tri-annual Member Forum meetings, and regular discussions with like-minded organizations across Canada. ■

To learn more

To learn more about FFCO's initiatives, visit FarmFoodCareON.org and subscribe to the monthly e-newsletter. Comments and questions can always be directed to FFCO staff directly at info@farmfoodcare.org.

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When does gene editing make sense in livestock production?



Lilian Schaer, Agricultural Writer
for Livestock Research Innovation Corporation

Interest in the possibilities offered by gene editing is growing – in both human medicine and in the livestock world. The technology is still evolving, the regulatory environment is complicated, and it is still unknown how consumers will respond, but gene editing can offer significant solutions to some of the big challenges in livestock production.

Dr. Mike Lohuis, Vice President of Research and Innovation at Semex Alliance, believes the world will see gradual regulatory approval of gene editing projects in key markets over the next decade.

“Gene editing is a more exact and powerful form of genetic engineering than Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and more likely to be accepted,” he said during a Horizon Series webinar on gene editing hosted by Livestock Research Innovation Corporation (LRIC) last year.

“We are likely to see it in high value, high market scenarios where the market is big enough (for companies) to recoup their investment. It makes the most sense if it is a solution to a thorny problem like disease risk, environmental protection, climate change adaption, animal welfare or food safety,” he added.

A recent high-profile example comes from pork production, where researchers have developed a pig that is resistant to Porcine Reproductive Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) virus. PRRS is the costliest swine disease in the world, costing the North American industry hundreds of millions of dollars in losses every year. It is estimated that up to 80 per cent of piglets infected with PRRS will die from the virus.

Already approved in Colombia and Brazil, the technology is currently under review in Canada, the United States, China, Japan, and Mexico.

“PRRS is an animal health issue. It solves a thorny problem: vaccines don’t work very well, so there is no traditional solution, and the size of the market is huge,” Lohuis said, adding it remains to be seen whether consumers will accept the technology, even though it will protect pigs from disease and suffering.

In cattle, researchers are working on developing animals resistant to Bovine Viral Diarrhea (BVD) virus, as well as animals that don’t require dehorning and those that are more heat-resistant.

Activist pressure and a lack of understanding of the technology created public resistance to GMOs that led to the failures of early high profile

genetic modification breeding projects – even though they also solved so-called thorny issues.

About two decades ago, the United States Department of Agriculture developed a mastitis-resistant cow. In the late 1990s, the University of Guelph bred the Enviropig, animals modified to produce manure that was more environmentally friendly because of lower phosphorus levels.

In both instances, the animals were transgenic, meaning researchers used a gene from another species in their breeding process, creating a GMO.

The most famous animal GMO on the market is the AquaBounty Salmon, where a growth hormone gene from a Chinook salmon was transferred into an Atlantic Salmon. It grows faster, using less feed and although it

has been approved for sale in Canada, the United States, and Brazil, it continues to be a target of activists.

Gene editing, by comparison, is deleting, modifying, or replacing genes that already exist in the species without introducing any new material from other species.

Different types of gene editing will generate a variety of outcomes.

In the case of the PRRS-resistant pigs, insertion/deletion (INDEL) or site-specific edits were used to shut down the receptor for the virus, so it can’t find any place to adhere to. To create hornless dairy cattle, researchers replaced what was there in the typical breed, and to create BVD-resistant cattle, researchers edited a very specific gene.

“Gene editing is most useful for traits with no current solutions. It is progressing more slowly in animals than in crops, and technical hurdles remain. Unexpected results can occur and require significant diligence to achieve only the expected edit,” Lohuis says, adding that regulatory barriers will likely remain high for the foreseeable future.

Dr. Shayan Sharif, interim Vice President of Research and Innovation at the University of Guelph, believes there are two contexts where gene editing livestock makes sense: the sustainability of agriculture and its impact on the environment, and disease resistance.

He cautions, however, that it is also important to consider possible negative consequences of editing. Resistant animals could still become infected with a virus and shed it into the environment even though they don’t show signs of the disease.

As well, he notes, disease resistance involves a lot of different genes, and with viruses continually evolving, it will be necessary to keep pace with that evolution.

LRIC’s Horizon Series webinar with Dr. Lohuis is available at https://livestockresearch.ca/sector/gene_editing_in_livestock.

Livestock Research Innovation Corporation is funded in part by the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (Sustainable CAP), a 5-year, federal-provincial-territorial initiative. This article is provided by LRIC as part of its ongoing efforts to report on research, innovation, and issues affecting the Canadian livestock industry.

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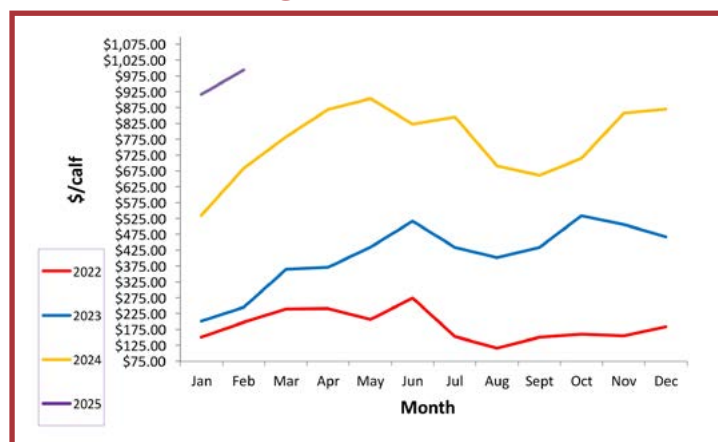
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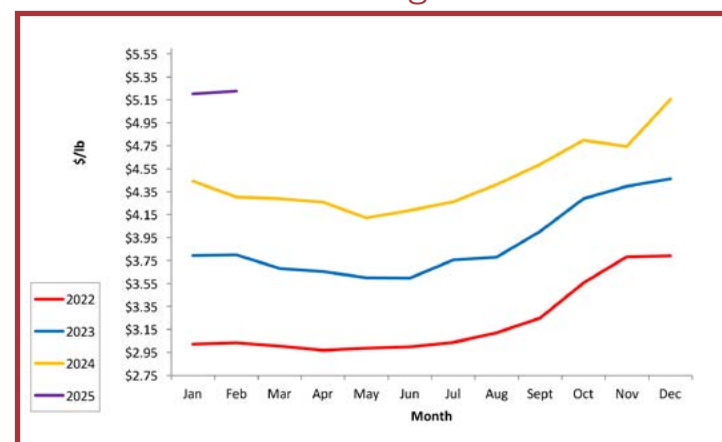
This information is collected from various sources and disseminated by Veal Farmers of Ontario.

Bob Calf Pricing



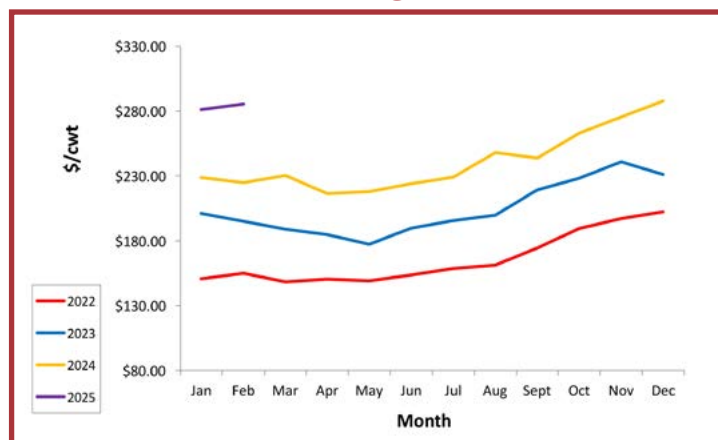
This price range is collected and tabulated from participating sale barns throughout Ontario based on average pricing. This information is used to follow trends.

Rail Grade Veal Pricing



This information is collected from producer contributions on a weekly basis. Once the numbers are collected a weighted average is calculated. The weighted average gives a more realistic price of what is happening in the market. This information is used to follow trends.

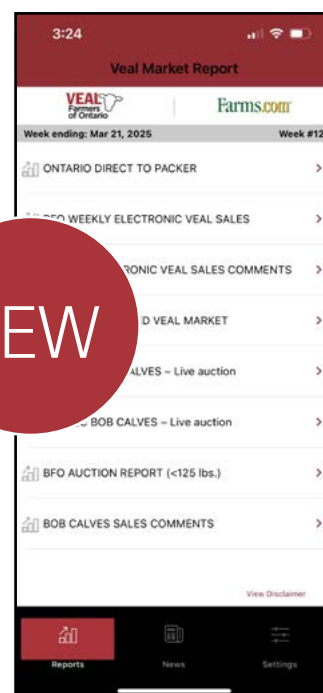
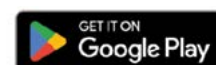
Sale Barn Veal Pricing



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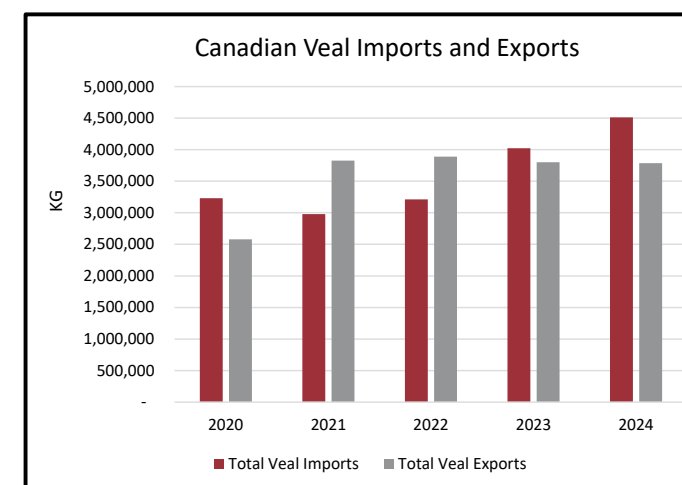
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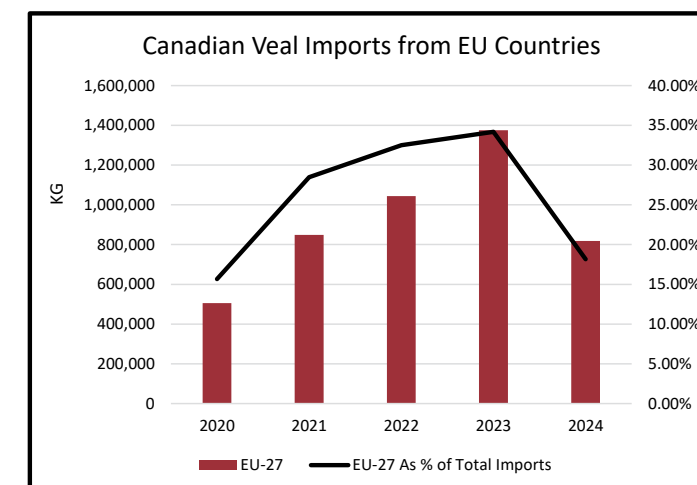
Veal Trade Tracker

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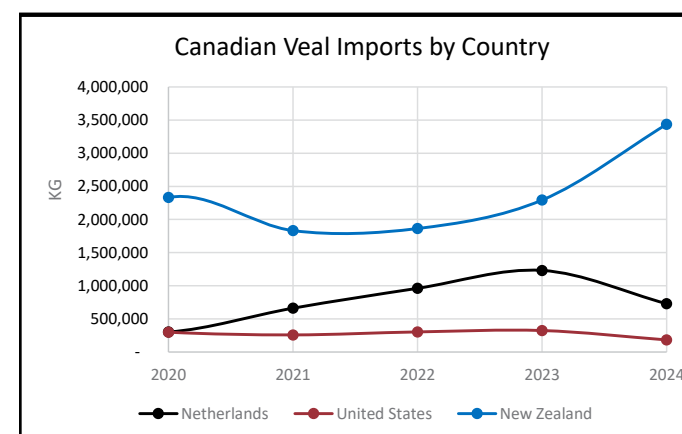
A quarterly snapshot of Canada's veal trade



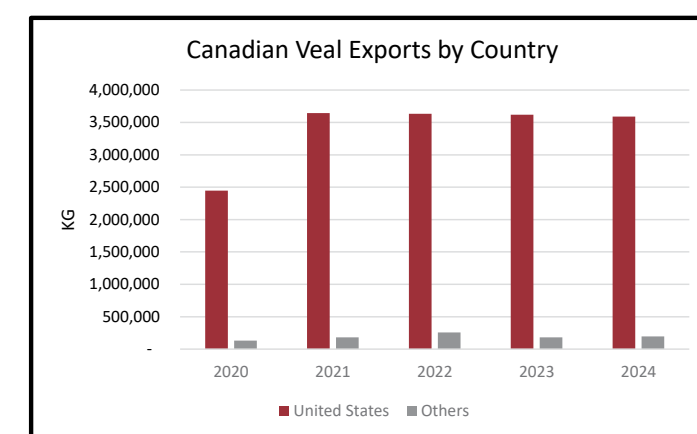
In the latter half of 2024 veal imports significantly exceed exports. 2024 imports (by volume) have risen by 12% compared with volumes in 2023. Exports remain slightly below 2023 levels.



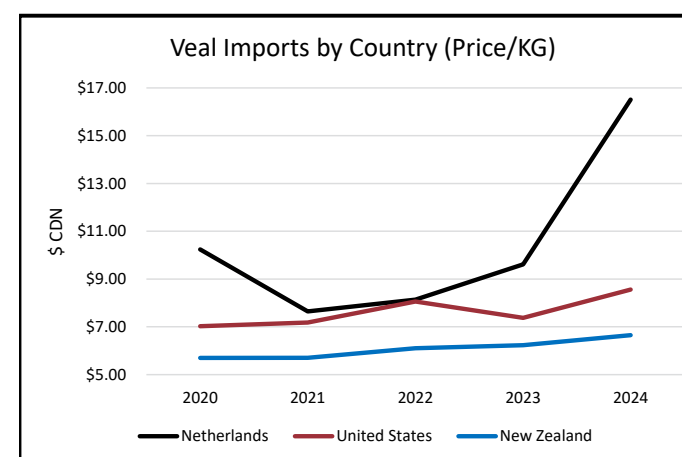
The volume of veal imports from the EU represents 18% of Canada's total veal imports (black line). Imports from the EU fell sharply in 2024 replaced by cheaper cuts from New Zealand. In addition to the Netherlands, Italy is also a predominant source of European imports.



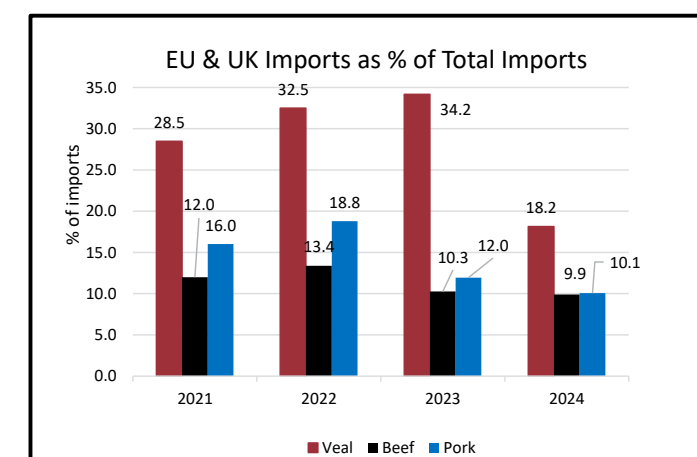
Imports from the United States are consistent with 2023 levels. Imports from the Netherlands have decreased by half compared to this time in 2023. New Zealand's share of Canada's veal imports has grown significantly in 2024.



Veal exports to the United States have declined slightly in 2024 compared to the previous year. The balance of Canada's veal exports, which are sent to the Middle East, remain steady.



The per kilogram price of veal imported from the Netherlands rose significantly in 2024 and remains higher than other countries. The value of American cuts rose slightly in 2024, while the value of New Zealand imports held relatively steady.



When compared to other red meat categories, the share of veal being imported into Canada from the EU and UK is consistently two to three times higher.

Data retrieved from AAFC and Statistics Canada, red meat section.

FEATURED VEAL RECIPE

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Grilled Veal Rib Chops Florentine

Cut: Chops/Steaks | Servings: 2-4

This new recipe for tender, grilled, bone-in veal chops was given to us courtesy of the great Chef Ted Reader. It's seasoned with Ted's steak spice, fresh dill, and features a creamy, cheesy Florentine loaded with sautéed baby spinach. Finally it's topped with crispy prosciutto.

Ingredients:

- 2 x 16 oz bone in Ontario Veal Rib Chops
- 5 tbsp olive oil, divided
- 4 tsp steak spice
- 2 tbsp fresh chopped dill
- 2 tbsp butter
- 1 medium sweet onion, finely diced
- 4 plump cloves garlic, minced
- 12 oz baby spinach
- 1 oz marsala wine
- 1 cup 35% whipping cream
- ½ cup shredded provolone or mozzarella
- ¼ cup grated parmesan cheese
- ¼ cup chopped fresh chives
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 4 slices prosciutto

Instructions:

Brush rib steaks with 3 tbsp of olive oil on all sides. Season with steak spice and fresh dill and set aside for 30 minutes.

Fire up your grill to high. Grill veal for 5 to 6 minutes per side for medium rare doneness. While the steaks are cooking add 2 tbsp of olive oil and the butter to a heavy bottomed fry pan and sauté the onions and garlic for 1 to 2 minutes until tender. Add in the spinach, a handful at a time, turning over the mounds with a pair of tongs as it wilts. Sauté baby spinach for 2 to 3 minutes until the leaves are just starting to wilt. Add in the marsala wine and let it boil. Add the whipping cream and return to a boil, stirring and reducing cream by 1/3. Add in provolone and parmesan cheese, mixing well as it gets a little cheesy. Add chives and season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper.

While the steaks are grilling, grill the prosciutto for 2 to 3 minutes per side until crispy, set aside. To serve, spoon creamed spinach over rib steak, add 2 slices of chopped grilled prosciutto and serve immediately. ■

Source: Ted Reader BBQ (TedReader.com)



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✉ info@vealfarmers.ca

Licenced dealers

As a veal (bob calves, started/preconditioned calves, and finished veal cattle) producer, you should be dealing with licenced dealers who are remitting veal licence fees/check-off on behalf of the farmers they are collecting from. If you are selling bob calves from your dairy farm, the licence fee/check-off is to be collected and remitted by the person purchasing those calves. If you sell your calves to a sales barn, the licence fees/check-off is remitted on your behalf. Please contact the Veal Farmers of Ontario (VFO) office to ensure we have your updated contact information, including your email address. If you are dealing with an unlicenced dealer, you are not protected under the Ontario Beef Cattle Financial Protection Program (OBCFPP). You could be in jeopardy of losing the money from the sale, especially if you received a cheque for payment. If it is unclear if the dealer is licenced, ask to see the licence, check the Agricorn website at <https://agricorp.com> or contact the VFO office.

2025 VFO licence fee remittances

Ontario Regulation 58/15 Veal Cattle Marketing requires any person who receives veal cattle to deduct from the money payable for the veal cattle any licence fees payable to the local board by the person from whom the veal cattle is received and to forward the licence fees to the local board. Bob calves and preconditioned calves are considered veal cattle. This regulation also includes veal cattle that are sent for custom slaughter.

If you are purchasing male dairy and dairy crossbreed bob calves (up to 150 lbs.) and pre-conditioned intact male dairy and dairy crossbreed calves (up to 450 lbs.) licence fees are required.

If veal cattle are purchased from a sale barn this does not apply.

Licence fee remittances are due on the 15th of the following month.

Forms 4 and 5 are available on <https://vealfarmers.ca> or contact the VFO office to have copies mailed.

Ontario Beef Cattle Financial Protection Program

Agricorn is the Delivery Agent of the OBCFPP and Administrator for the Livestock Financial Protection Board. All communication, including but not limited to: Late Payments Reports, Claims to the Fund, and Licencing inquiries, must be directed to Agricorn. Visit <https://agricorp.com> or call 1-888-247-4999 for more information. ■

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