

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.

Purchasing calves

The quality and health of calves upon arrival at the veal facility is a major factor in their subsequent health, need for treatment, growth performance and carcass quality. All veal producers must have access to a copy of the *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Veal Cattle* (the Code) and be familiar with and comply with the requirements in the Code. The Code is the veal industry's standard of care. The following are points to consider when purchasing calves:

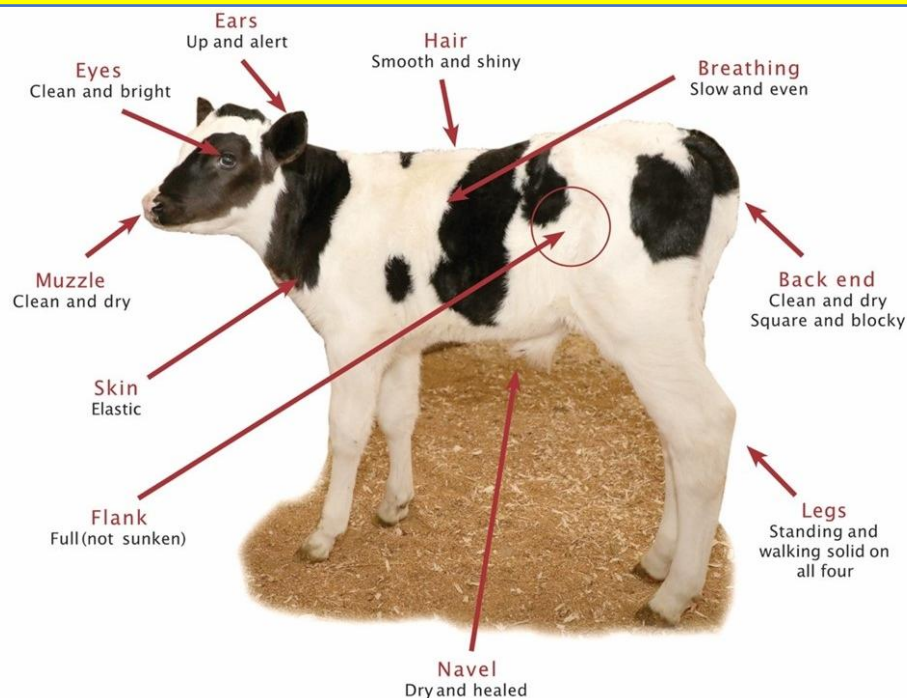
- Limit the number of sources for male dairy calves
 - Source calves from locations with the shortest journey
 - Calves cannot travel longer than 12 hours from the last feeding
- If purchasing directly from dairy farms:
 - Ensure the calf had four litres of colostrum within six hours of birth
 - All medication the calf has received, and outstanding withdrawal dates, should have been recorded and sent with the calf
- Calves should be nine days of age or older
 - It is recommended that calves be at least 14 days of age before leaving the dairy farm
- Ensure calves do not have a fever
 - Normal calf temperature is 38.5°C
- Evaluate calves for signs of dehydration
 - Ensure eyes are not sunken
 - Test skin elasticity
- Ensure calves have a dry, healed navel
 - An infected navel can cost around \$40.00
 - Calves with unhealed navels are considered unfit for transportation

- Ensure calves do not have a sunken flank
 - Calves with a sunken flank have a four times greater risk of dying in the first 21 days
- Do not purchase calves with scours
 - Diarrhea could cost up to \$150 in losses per case
- Ensure joints are not swollen
- Calves should be square and blocky
 - Look at the muzzle and back-end
 - This type of calf will develop a better finish than a lean, narrow calf
- Holstein is the preferred breed for veal
 - Should be at least 41 kg (90 lbs.)
- The calf can easily rise unassisted and appears alert and sturdy
- Hair coat is clean and shiny
- Ears are up and alert
- Breathing is steady and even
- Handle calves in a quiet manner, abusive handling is unacceptable
 - Do not use electric prods!
- Always deal with a licenced dealer
 - An up-to-date list is available on <https://www.agricorp.com/en-ca/Programs/OBCFPP/Pages/licensed-dealer-list.aspx>
 - Have the licence fees been paid for the calf?
- For more detailed information on calf health, visit <https://calfcare.ca>

Purchasing calves is one of the most important parts of being a veal farmer. If the right calves are not purchased, there will be challenges that could last a long time and have a poor return on investment.

It is worth the extra time and cost to purchase healthy, strong calves, free of sickness. Once some diseases like *Salmonella* Dublin are introduced in the barn, it will always be present.

NOTE: The only way for calf quality to improve is for veal producers to communicate with dairy farmers, sales barns, and dealers. Make is clear what is needed and refuse to buy if the calf does not meet those standards.



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 producer resources here: <https://vealfarmers.ca/producer-information/resources/>

Find the *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Veal Cattle* here:

https://vealfarmers.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/veal_cattle_code_of_practice.pdf

References available upon request.

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Find us online:

<https://vealfarmers.ca>

<https://calfcare.ca>

Find us on social:

X: [@OntarioVeal](#)

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[Finishing grain-fed veal in Ontario](#) private group

[Marketing of male dairy calves in Ontario](#) private group

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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