



ALL ABOUT VEAL

What you didn't even know you needed to know!

Veal is a high quality, nutritious and flavourful red meat. It's a lot like beef in many ways - both types of meat come from cattle and the animals are raised in similar ways on family farms in Ontario. The big difference lies in the breed of the cattle.

Let us explain what we mean by that, along with other things you might not know about veal and veal farming in Ontario.

Four things you must know about veal cattle

1

Veal is part of the circular economy: dairy animals that can't produce milk are responsibly raised on family farms for meat instead, ensuring everything that is produced is used.

2

Veal cattle are the second oldest animal we eat: they weigh over 750 pounds (340 kilograms) when they go to market.

3

Veal is raised no differently than other red meat: in groups, on farms by family farmers who are committed to animal health and welfare.

4

Veal farming is sustainable farming: many veal farms have been in the same family for generations, farmers who are committed to the sustainability of farming, the environment and rural economies.

BREED BASICS

In Canada, beef comes from a variety of cattle breeds, like Angus, Limousin, Charolais, Simmental or Hereford that are raised for their ability to produce meat. Most of Ontario's veal cattle, however, come from the Holstein dairy breed, the familiar black-and-white animals that are most commonly used in dairy production because of their ability to produce a lot of milk. Other dairy breeds are Brown Swiss, Jersey, Guernsey and Ayrshire cattle.

In order for a dairy cow to produce milk, she must give birth to a calf. Female calves are known as heifers and they are raised to produce milk and have calves of their own. Male calves, called bulls, can't produce milk so they are raised for meat instead, just like beef cattle. It's part of how farmers contribute to the circular economy concept in food production: everything that is produced has a purpose and nothing is wasted.



In the beginning

Almost all dairy cows in Canada are bred (become pregnant) through artificial insemination. This lets farmers breed animals for specific characteristics. Cows are pregnant for about nine months before giving birth to their calf. Once calves are born, they are moved into their own pen so farmers can care for them. This means, for example, feeding them colostrum, which is the first milk that cows produce. It's full of important nutrients that will help the calves build a healthy immune system.

Dairy calves weigh about 100 pounds (45 kilograms) when they are born and become very alert and active right away - in fact, they are walking and eating within minutes of birth!



Life ON THE FARM

Once they are old enough, male calves leave the dairy farm. Why, you might ask? Dairy farms specialize in milk production, not raising animals for meat, so male calves are moved to veal farms that focus on raising animals for meat. Veal farmers buy animals from many different dairy farms, so they take special steps to protect them from getting sick when they first come onto the farm, like vaccinating them against different diseases.

Although many veal cattle are placed into group pens right away, some live in individual covered outdoor pens called hutches or in individual pens inside the barn for the first few weeks of their lives. This is to keep them from being exposed to any illnesses that other cattle might have and give their immune systems a chance to develop. They are fed milk replacer, which is milk powder mixed with water and contains a balanced diet of protein, fat, carbohydrates, minerals and vitamins. They are also given water and calf starter, which is a solid feed fed to calves to help them transition away from milk and support their healthy gut development.



Did you know...

that milk replacer is also part of the circular economy? It's made from by-products of dairy processing, such as cheese-making for example, helping the industry be more sustainable and reduce food waste.

Once veal cattle leave their individual pens, they are moved into barns where they live in group pens bedded with straw or wood shavings together with other veal cattle of the same size and age. This is to make sure they all have equal access to feed and water, as well as give them opportunities to socialize or interact with other cattle. They eat a high energy diet of mainly grains like corn, feed pellets that are made of protein, vitamins and minerals, and a small amount of daily fibre. Professional livestock nutritionists work with farmers make sure their veal cattle are fed a healthy, balanced diet.



Fact

A 600 pound (272 kilogram) veal animal will eat 15 pounds (seven kilograms) of grain a day and drink up to eight gallons (30 litres) of water - **that's the same as 14 boxes of cereal and 15 two-litre cartons of milk!**



Debunking the veal age myth



A common misconception is that veal is the meat of very young animals. That couldn't be further from the truth! In fact, by the time they reach their market weight, veal cattle are the second oldest farm animal raised for meat - and also one of the largest. For some context compared to other meat proteins, only beef cattle are older and heavier by the time they are ready for market.

A veal animal is ready for market at around 750 pounds (340 kilograms), which is at approximately seven to eight months of age. Beef animals, by comparison, are marketed at 1200 to 1300 pounds (550 to 600 kilograms) at approximately 24 months of age.



Who are Ontario's veal farmers?

As with all farms in Canada, the vast majority of veal farms are family farms - owned and run by Ontario families who care about animals, the land, and ensuring the sustainability of farming and food production for future generations. Some of these farms have been in the same family for generations; all veal farms make important contributions to Ontario's rural communities and the provincial economy.



Veal cattle welfare and the humane treatment of animals

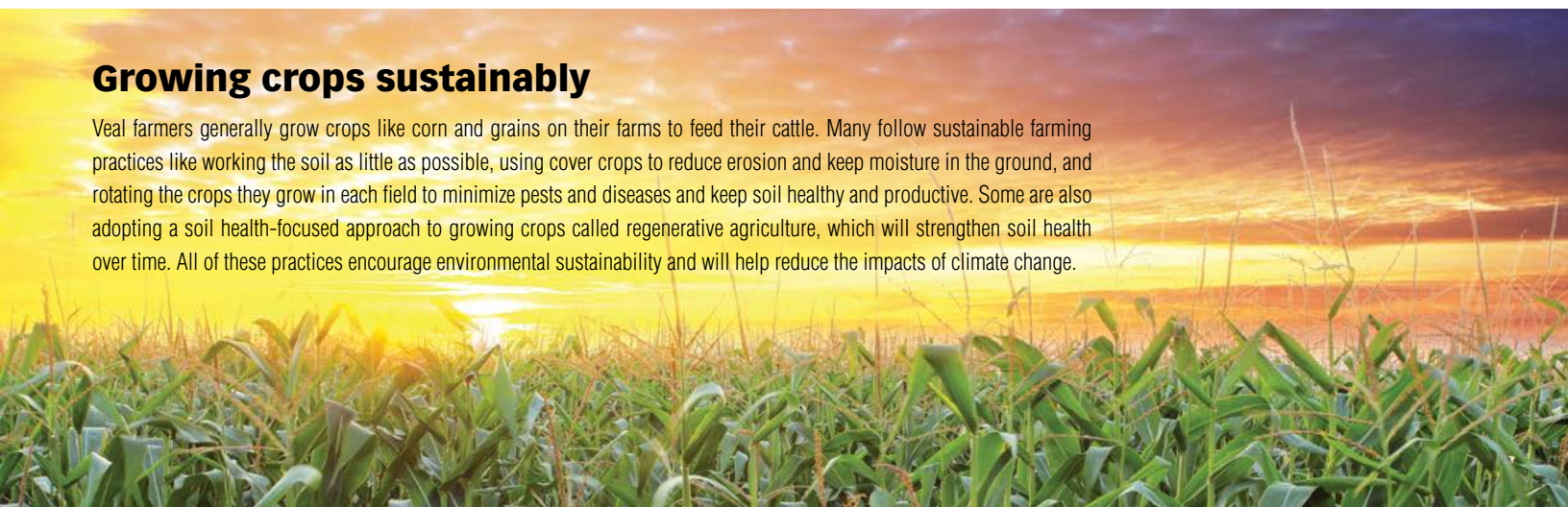
Veal cattle health and welfare is a top priority for veal farmers, and they take that responsibility seriously. Canada's national *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Veal Cattle* (the Code) is the science and consensus-based standard of responsible care for veal cattle in Canada. The Code is informed by the latest research and understanding of veal cattle behaviour and welfare. The Code spells out what farmers need to do to ensure veal cattle are healthy, safe, and well-cared for, able to express normal behavior, and experience freedom from hunger, thirst, discomfort, pain, injury, disease, fear, and distress. More information is available at <https://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/veal-cattle>.

Farmers work closely with veterinarians to make sure veal cattle are healthy and productive. Veterinarians are very knowledgeable about production practices, health, and welfare and can advise farmers about the best treatment and care their animals need.

There are also very specific rules that farmers must follow when it comes to handling and transporting veal cattle. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) oversees these regulations, which cover everything from weather and maximum travel times to adequate space, access to food and water, and how to deal with animals that are considered compromised or unfit for transport.

Growing crops sustainably

Veal farmers generally grow crops like corn and grains on their farms to feed their cattle. Many follow sustainable farming practices like working the soil as little as possible, using cover crops to reduce erosion and keep moisture in the ground, and rotating the crops they grow in each field to minimize pests and diseases and keep soil healthy and productive. Some are also adopting a soil health-focused approach to growing crops called regenerative agriculture, which will strengthen soil health over time. All of these practices encourage environmental sustainability and will help reduce the impacts of climate change.



Q&A

Most commonly asked questions and answers about veal



“ **Where does veal come from?**

Veal is the meat of male dairy animals. A dairy cow must have a calf in order to produce milk. Female calves, called heifers, are raised to have their own calves and produce milk themselves when they are mature. Male calves, called bulls, are not able to produce milk, so they are raised for meat instead, similar to beef cattle.

Raising veal cattle is one way farmers contribute to sustainable food production and a circular food economy - making sure everything that is produced has a purpose to reduce waste as much as possible.

“ **How is veal different than beef?**

Beef and veal come from different breeds of cattle. Just like other animals, for example, there are many different breeds of cattle, each with their own special characteristics.

Beef comes from specific breeds of cattle, like Angus, Hereford and others, that are bred and raised specifically to produce meat that is well-marbled.

Veal, on the other hand, is meat that comes from male dairy animals. In Ontario, the most common breed of dairy cow is the black and white Holstein, because of its ability to produce a lot of milk. The animals are well-muscled and very lean. Holstein or Holstein/beef cross-bred cattle make up 95 per cent of the veal cattle in Ontario; the remaining are from other dairy cattle breeds like Jersey, Brown Swiss, Ayrshire and Guernsey.

“ **I see all the white huts on farms in the country - are those all veal?**

No. Those white huts are called hutches and they are sometimes used to house both female and male dairy calves in the first few weeks of their lives. That's to help them develop a healthy immune system before they are moved into barns where they mingle with other cattle. There, they live in group pens bedded with straw or wood shavings with other cattle of the same size and age as they continue to grow. Veal cattle aren't sent to market until they reach a weight of about 750 pounds (340 kilograms).

“ **I've heard that veal is from baby cows - is this true?**

No, this is a common misconception about veal cattle. Veal cattle are raised to about seven to eight months of age and about 750 pounds (340 kilograms) before they are sent to market. In fact, veal is the second oldest meat Canadians eat; only beef cattle are older and heavier when they have reached market weight.

“ **What is the difference between grain-fed and milk-fed veal?**

In Ontario, the veal industry only produces grain-fed veal - veal cattle that have been raised primarily on a grain-based diet. In Quebec, the United States and Europe, farmers also raise what is called milk-fed veal. Those are animals that eat a primarily milk-based diet for most of their lives. Although their diet is different, both milk-fed and grain-fed veal cattle receive the same quality of care and attention to their health and welfare.

“ **I heard veal is mistreated - is that true?**

No. Veal farmers, like all livestock farmers, make the health and welfare of their animals their top priority. Healthy animals are productive animals, but first and foremost, farmers care for their cattle because it is the right thing to do.

A national *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Veal Cattle* (these codes exist for all farmed livestock species) sets the standard for responsible care of veal cattle in Canada. As well, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency requires all farmers to follow its regulations about the care and handling of livestock in transport.

Veal Farmers of Ontario strongly condemns any animal abuse, and the veal industry works closely with the Ministry of the Solicitor General's Provincial Animal Welfare Services which is responsible for on-farm animal care issues in the province. Veal farmers are also active participants in the Animal Care Helpline operated by Farm & Food Care Ontario.

Would you like to tour a real Ontario veal farm and see for yourself?



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