

Fact Sheet: Bob Veal in Canada

Dairy producers produce milk, heifers and cull cows, and they also produce bull calves. Most bull calves are shipped soon after being born on a dairy farm. You may be surprised to learn that your bull calves can be processed for veal much sooner than you think.

Where do bull calves go after they leave my farm?

Typically, bull calves leaving a dairy farm go to a livestock auction market, and end up either in a beef feedlot program or with a specialized veal producer who raises those calves to desired market weights over a number of months. Today, due to changing consumer demand and fluctuating market prices for bull calves, those bull calves may be purchased for immediate slaughter. Calves are being processed in Ontario and Quebec as soon as 2 days after leaving your farm!

How does this impact my farm?

You have to be extra-vigilant to ensure that the calves leaving your farm are not going to pose a food safety risk to consumers. Under the CQM program, you must:

- Only treat calves with drugs approved in Canada for dairy cattle or obtain veterinary prescriptions.
- Follow the label! Read the label carefully and make sure you are treating your calves according to the label or written veterinary prescription.
- Keep detailed records of any treatments given to calves that have a withdrawal period associated with them.
- Check the treatment record before shipping an animal. Do not sell calves until the meat withdrawals have been met. Remember that if you have a veterinary prescription for an extra label use, you must follow the withdrawal on the prescription, as it may be longer than the label.
- If you must sell a calf before the completed meat withdrawal, you must clearly inform the next buyer and transfer the information of any treatments that the calf has been given and any out-standing withdrawal times. You can do this by noting the information directly on the bill of sale or by using the example shipping record in the CQM Workbook.
- Identify calves leaving the farm according to CCIA, NLID or ATQ standards.

Another important recommended practice is to ensure that your bull calves receive adequate colostrum and nutrition to help prevent them from becoming sick while they are in your care.

Residues will be traced back to YOU!

A calf may change hands a few times before it arrives at the processing plant; however, when a carcass is found to have a residue violation, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) uses the ID tag to trace the condemned carcass back to the farm of origin: YOU. CFIA sends a violation letter to the farm and sends an inspector to the farm for an educational visit.

Make sure that you do your due diligence and follow the best management practices outlined above to make sure that you are not causing a food safety problem or paying the penalty for someone else's mistake along the chain. If you have records showing the treatments your calves received and a copy of the bill of sale clearly outlining any outstanding withdrawals, you will be in a much better position to demonstrate that you were not the cause of the problem.

Why the fuss? What is the issue?

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) reported the violation rates in Ontario over the past two years in bob veal carcasses (≤ 70 lbs dressed) was similar to light calves (≤ 176 lbs dressed) ranging from 5 to 10%. Although every light veal carcass is tested and any violative carcasses or parts that are condemned do not enter the food chain, these violation rates are not acceptable.

What is the cause of the residues?

The drug residues found in light calves' carcasses span various different drug categories. You may expect that residues related to scour pills (sulfamethazine) were the main problem; however, they accounted for less than half of the violations. More than a dozen drug residues are commonly found in light calves, most of which (but not all) are antibiotics and some of which are only found in mastitis treatments in Canada.

Remember: tests at the plant are becoming more and more sensitive and, therefore, are able to detect smaller and smaller traces of residues. If you use a drug that is not approved for cattle or calves, any trace of the drug residue is considered a violation. You must use approved drugs and follow the label or obtain a veterinary prescription to ensure that you are treating your calves appropriately and following adequate withdrawal times.

Is this a regional issue?

Light calves are processed in Ontario and Quebec; however, light calves from MB, NB, NS or PE could be processed in Ontario. Regardless of your location, you should follow the best management practices outlined above to ensure that the calves leaving your farm are safe for consumers.

Thanks to the Ontario Veal Association and OMAFRA for the information in this fact sheet