

NAVAN VETERINARY SERVICES – NOVEMBER 2015 NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is largely a reprint (with permission) from a CQM Factsheet in 2012. It is a good reminder of what happens to the cull bull calves from your dairies and some of the issues facing that industry as it relates to antibiotic residues in these animals.

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. Where do these calves go? What are the *issues*? *You may* be surprised to learn that your bull calves can be slaughtered 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, where a cattle dealer purchases them, and subsequently sells them to a specialized veal producer who raises those calves to desired market weights over a number of months. Bull calves can also go into a beef feedlot program, depending on market conditions. 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 slaughtered in Ontario and Quebec as soon as 2 days after leaving your farm! Your bull calves may follow a different route along the chain, as some producers sell their calves directly to a cattle dealer. Regardless, you need to be aware that once your calves leave your farm, they could be destined for the human food chain much sooner than you expect.

Residues will be traced back to YOU!

A calf may change hands a few times before it ends up at the slaughterhouse; however, when a carcass is found to have a residue violation, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) uses the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA), National Livestock Identification (NLID) or Agri-Traçabilité Québec (ATQ) tag to trace the condemned carcass back to the farm of origin:

YOU.

The CFIA will also be given the information on the supplier of the calf (e.g. cattle dealer), but they are mostly interested in the farm of origin. CFIA sends a violation letter to the farm and requests one of the district offices to send 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 out-standing withdrawals, you will be in a much better position to demonstrate that you were not the cause of the problem.

How old are calves when they are slaughtered?

Ontario has 2 categories of veal calves:

1. Light calves (includes Bob veal): market weight less than 176 lbs dressed.
2. Veal calves: market weight at 176 to 396 lbs dressed.

Why the fuss? What is the issue?

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs reported that the violation rate in light calves' carcasses was 10% in 2010 (144 violations in 1460 calves), which is very high. Every light veal carcass is tested. In contrast, the violation rate in veal calves was 4% in 2010 (7 violations in 177 calves), and only those calves that show risk indicators (e.g. injury, inflammation, infectious illness) are selected for testing. The data clearly shows a residue issue with light calves. The majority of the residue follow-up reports from the CFIA indicate that the producers were completely unaware that their bull calves sold to the livestock auction market could go directly to slaughter.

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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. The most common drug residues found in light calves are Sulfamethazine, Sulfadoxine, Sulfathiazole, Penicillin G, Tilmicosin, Tulathromycin, Pirlimycin, Tetracycline, Florfenicol, Oxytetracycline and Neomycin. Some of these drugs are those found in mastitis treatment products. Feeding waste milk from treated cows can result in violative residues in these bull calves.

Some other possible explanations for the violative residues include (by producers or cattle dealers):

- Treatment records not maintained or not checked before shipping a calf.
- Withdrawal periods not followed or not passed on to the buyer.
- Treatments administered extra-label (i.e. different route of administration, drug not approved for calves, larger dose, etc.) and veterinary prescriptions not obtained for their use.
- Human error: the wrong treatment given or the wrong animal treated.
- Calves not identified.

Is this a regional issue?

Light calves are being slaughtered in Ontario and Quebec; however, light calves from MB, NB, NS or PE could be slaughtered 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.

Who can I contact for more information?

1. Your provincial producer association
2. Visit: www.dairyfarmers.org/cqm