

Cull Cows in Canada: Why Are They Important and What Can We Do?



In 2017, approximately 184,000 cows were culled from dairy farms in Canada enrolled in Dairy Herd Improvement (DHI). Many of these animals were culled due to low productivity and an inability to get pregnant, however, some were culled because they reached the end of their productive life.

Research conducted in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia suggests that a significant number of cull cows arrive to auction in poor condition. These studies also showed that cattle arriving with poor health sold for a reduced overall price. This is an important welfare issue. These animals can be seen by consumers at public auction and influence perceptions of the industry.

Ensuring Cows Are Fit for Transport

Identifying cows that are not fit for transport can aid in improving the condition of cull cows. Cull cows can travel long distances en route to slaughter (as much as 4,500 km) and be in transit for up to 7-10 days.

A brief outline of some of the considerations that should be made prior to transport include ensuring the cow is:

- In good body condition
- Not lame
- Does not have a fever
- Alert and responsive
- Milk is normal
- Past necessary withdrawal times

Proactive Culling Decisions

Another strategy to limit the number of compromised cull cows entering into the marketing chain is to make culling decisions sooner. Proactive culling means taking steps to ensure that every cow that leaves the farm is able to make the trip without undue suffering. To determine which cows to cull, there are a variety of things to consider:

- Pregnancy status
- Lactation
- Milk production
- Previous disease status



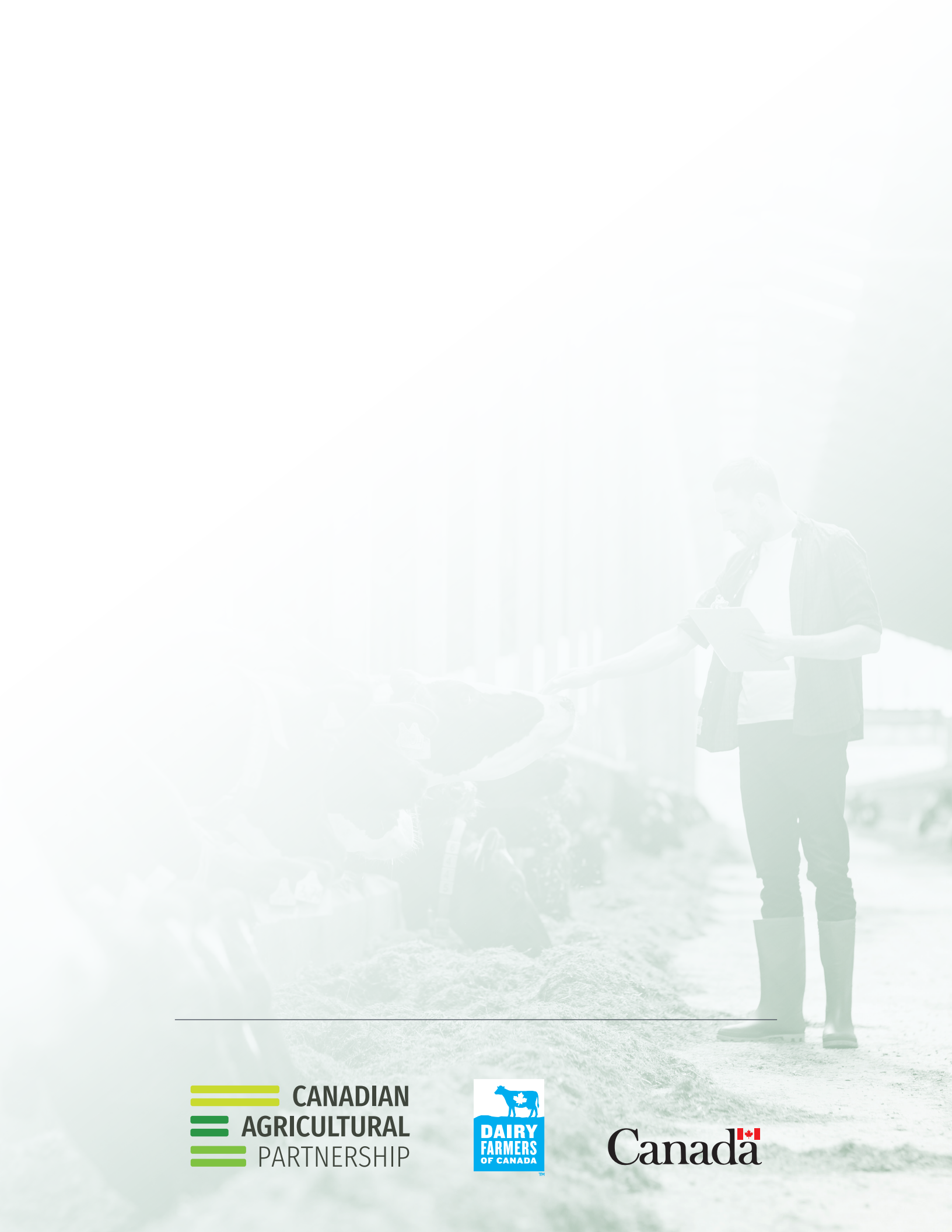
Research has shown that making more proactive culling decisions can improve returns by \$136 per cow.

For More Information

More resources are available online at www.dairyfarmers.ca/proaction
Contact your herd veterinarian to discuss specific culling decisions.

The Bottom Line

There's no "one size fits all" solution that can be used on every farm, so work with your veterinarian to develop a culling strategy that considers the factors that may make your farm unique.



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