

Food Safety



Bob Veal in Canada

Dairy farmers produce milk, replacement heifers and beef from cull cows, but they also produce beef from 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 farm or livestock auction market, and end up either in a beef feedlot program or with a specialized veal farmer who raises those calves to desired market weights over a number of months. Depending on consumer demand and fluctuating market prices for bull calves, those bull calves may also be purchased from the auction market for immediate slaughter, and be processed 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 Food Safety program (previously known as the Canadian Quality Milk program), you must:

- Only treat calves with drugs approved in Canada for dairy cattle or obtain the Form 8 (i.e. written Veterinary Directions for Extra-label Drug Use) for drugs not approved in Canada (over-the-counter drugs only) or for drugs used extra-label. Please refer to the Fact Sheet: Veterinary Drugs Requirements for more information on extra-label drugs.
- Follow the label or the veterinary directions for use on Form 8! Read the instructions carefully and make sure you are treating your calves according to the label or written veterinary directions.

- Keep detailed records of any treatments given to calves that have a withdrawal period associated with them. This means that treated bull calves must be identified with a unique permanent identifier (e.g. NLID/CCIA/ATQ tag or barn tag).
- Check the treatment record before shipping an animal. Do not sell calves until the meat withdrawals have been met. Remember that if you have written veterinary directions for an extra-label use, you must follow the withdrawal on the veterinary directions, as it may be longer than stated on the label.
- If you must sell a calf before the completed meat withdrawal, the Food Safety program requires that you 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 Workbook.
- Identify calves leaving the farm according to Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA), National Livestock Identification for Dairy (NLID) or Agri-Traçabilité Québec (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. To prevent potential residues in the meat, you should avoid feeding milk from treated cattle to bull calves.

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, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) uses the identification tag to trace the condemned carcass back to the farm of origin: YOU. CFIA sends a violation letter to the farm and follows up with a visit to the farm to review on-farm use and management of drugs used to treat calves.

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.

What is the issue?

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) reported that the positive residue test rates in Ontario over the past four years in bob veal carcasses (≤ 70 lbs dressed) and light calves (≤ 176 lbs dressed) has stayed stable at about 5 to 7% for bob veal and 3 to 4% for light calves. Although every light veal carcass is tested and any carcasses or parts that test positive are condemned and do not enter the food chain, these violation rates are not acceptable.

The positive residues found were from scour pills, antibiotics with very long withdrawals, and some drugs not approved for use in veal calves. If you treat a calf, you need to carefully follow the withdrawal times.

What is the cause of the residues?

More than a dozen drug residues are commonly found in light calves. Most, but not all, are antimicrobials and some are only found in mastitis treatments in Canada.

Remember: tests at the plant are becoming more and more sensitive and 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 written veterinary directions to ensure that you are treating your calves appropriately and following adequate withdrawal times.

Is this a regional issue?

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

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