

Transport young calves with care

The success of the veal industry relies on the safe arrival of healthy young calves to the growing facility. In some cases, this can mean moving from the maternity pen on a dairy farm to the veal barn on that same farm, while in other cases this can mean a calf moving from the dairy farm, through a sale barn or dealer, before arrival at the growing facility.



energy to keep warm at environmental temperatures of 13°C! Calves that must use energy to keep warm don't have energy reserves to power their immune system, never mind to keep growing. Ensuring calves are kept warm by avoiding transportation in extremely cold weather, adjusting trailer ventilation as appropriate and providing ample bedding in the trailer is important to ensuring calves aren't shivering away their growth potential.

Best practices for transporting calves (especially if less than one month old):

- Avoid transporting during very hot or very cold weather
- Plan routes and travel times to avoid traffic, minimizing transport time and distance as much as possible
- Transport calves once they are older than seven days (preferably 10 days of age or older)
- Do not transport calves that are sick or weak (unless for veterinary care)
- Disinfect trailers before loading
- Adjust trailer ventilation according to weather
- Feed calves before loading (for long journeys)
- Handle calves quietly and without electric prods. Electric prods should never be used on calves
- Provide ample bedding (especially in cold weather)
- Load calves at a density that allows all calves in a compartment to lay down at the same time
- Provide calves with feed, water, and a clean, well-bedded resting space upon arrival
- Avoid additional stressors such as tagging and vaccinating on arrival. Segregate new arrivals and perform these tasks once calves have settled in

Calves transported in the first weeks of life are more susceptible to pathogens than older cattle due to their naive immune system. Young calves must rely on maternal antibodies received from colostrum to protect them from pathogens in the environment. This is another example when care in the first hours of life can either set calves on a path to success or prevent them from reaching their potential. The importance of a good colostrum management system on the dairy farm cannot be overstated. If purchasing calves directly from the dairy farm, work with the dairy farmer to ensure calves are receiving enough high quality colostrum as soon as possible after birth. Calves may contract illnesses related to the stress of transport or that they encountered on the trailer up to one month after transport.

Calves also have a smaller range of temperatures in which they are comfortable, which puts them at greater risk of cold stress. Calves less than a week old that haven't been fed in six to eight hours begin to use



Livestock transport is one of the most discussed agricultural issues at the moment. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is in the process of updating the Federal Health of Animals Regulations (HAR) – part XII, Transportation of Animals. Further, the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) will be updating the “Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of farm animals – Transportation”. The Canadian Veal Association (CVA) will be working with the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) to ensure best practices for transporting young calves are included in the Code. Animal rights activists are also targeting this visible aspect of livestock agriculture. As such, producers want to ensure they are following the best practices for their farm animals, to protect animal health and welfare, public trust, and profitability. ■



To learn more about transporting young calves with care, see VFO's YouTube Video: “Transporting Veal Cattle”



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